

Exploring the Boundaries of Cinema and Entertainment

A Ramp through History...

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SYNERGY

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Synergy Magazine reviews DVDs from all regions. The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

DVD-R

DVD-R refers to titles which have not been formally released on DVD but release via specialty DVD firms.

NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

Blu Ray

We review Blu Rays from all regions; we will clearly list the region (or region free) on each disc. The best reference site for Blu Ray is <http://www.blu-ray.com>.

If you require an ALL region DVD and Blu-ray player, we recommend you look at the Kogan Blu-ray player (<http://www.kogan.com.au>)

For Adult titles, we include an extra reference **(E)** for explicit, **(M)** for mature. Adult content within mainstream titles will be mentioned as appropriate.

DD refers to Digital Download with the format of the download following in brackets.

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Features, articles, news and competitions only appear in the digital and print editions.

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Welcome to A Romp though History !

What a strange and wonderful issue of Synergy we have in store for you. Bob and I were discussing what sort of subject we should cover in the next issue and noted an increase in retro DVD releases. A large number of these titles were "historical" titles from the Sword and Sandal films to classics such as *Ben Hur*.

Accordingly we thought it would be fun to have an issue covering historical films from the sublime to the ridiculous ! From the informed to the fanciful.

We have the feature "*What have the Romans ever done for us ?*" covering everything from classic films on Rome to comedy, erotica and cult spectaculars. From classics to such controversial wonders as *Caligula*. Which is now being remade as a 3D adult film by Tinto Brass !

We have a look at *Asterix the Gaul*, Sword and Sandal films and the strange world of Alternate histories where nothing is as it seems, from different views of the past to how the present is projected into the future in science fiction.

There are feature reviews covering all manner

of historical films as well as our usual reviews covering everything from cult and comedy to general DVD releases, horror and world cinema

Of course *Thinking Time !* Is well packed with documentaries offering more than enough to keep the brain matter working.

Our next issue, just in time for that boring old holiday of Xmas, is just as quirky, called "*Peace on Earth ?*" it will examine the theme of conflict in film.

This is a wide subject covering everything from War in all its forms and representations to Westerns. Crime films, personal conflict and any other form of conflict we can dig up !

In *Thinking Time !* There will be lots of documentaries on conflict including a special on the DEFA collection from First Run Features.

We hope you find Synergy a breath of fresh air, offering a different, one may even say, eccentric approach to the world of cinema and entertainment.

**Editors
Synergy**

the CHILDREN

The Children is a suspenseful British horror film from director Tom Shankland. It has been released by Icon Films in September on both DVD and Blu Ray. For a full review see the horror section this issue.

Icon has made available five copies for giveaway.

For a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *The Children* in the subject line and your name and address in the email.

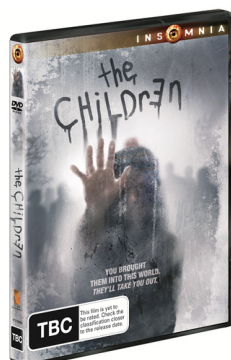
Giveaway is open to Australian residents only.

".....of the Dead" on Blu Ray !

At last George Romero's classic zombie films are available on high quality Blu Ray in Australia. Umbrella Entertainment has done a sterling job offering these high definition versions of these classic films.

Night of the Living Dead Blu Ray

In this trailblazing horror masterpiece, an army of advancing zombies with a blood-thirsty lust for human flesh force a lone group of human survivors to seek refuge in a farmhouse. Radiation from a fallen satellite has caused the dead to walk, and the only way to kill them is with a blow or gun shot to the head. As the small farmhouse community tries to fend off the onslaught of the dead, the tension builds to an apocalyptic conclusion as a petrol pump and pick-up truck offer the only hope of escape. There have been many imitators, but never anything quite like this!



Shot on black and white, and on a miniscule budget, George A Romero's original zombie classic is still terrifying over forty years later!

Day of the Dead

"DAY OF THE DEAD displays plenty of guts, as FX Maestro Tom Savini really comes of age with an amazing splatter platter of sliding guts, faceless zombie freaks, and provocative new makeups delivered with a chunkblowing gusto deserving of the highest praise."

Chas Balun in **Beyond Horror Holocaust**



Special two disc edition with commentary, a feature length doco Reflections on the Living Dead, behind the scenes featurette, still galleries and loads more.

Dawn of the Dead

As modern society is consumed by zombie carnage, four desperate survivors barricade themselves inside a shopping mall to battle the flesh-eating hordes of the undead. This is the biggest, baddest, bloodiest zombie film of them all!!



Featuring award-winning make-up effects from horror legend Tom Savini, Dawn of the Dead is a tour-de-force of gore in the best George A. Romero tradition.

Two disc special edition loaded with extras including commentaries, The Dead Will Walk documentary, interviews, Fan of the Dead, Document of the Dead - 84 mins Document of the Dead - Lost Interview and Document of the Dead - Deleted Scenes.

GIVEAWAYS

Umbrella has given us one of each Blu Ray to giveaway to a lucky reader.

For a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *of the Dead* in the subject line and your name and address in the email.

Each winner will receive one of the Blu Rays randomly chosen by our staff,

Giveaway is open to Australian residents only.



Razer Orca

Too often we are forced to choose between what's comfortable and what looks good. Chances are if you want to avoid flashbang sized headaches, you are going to find your dome lodged in some pretty dumb looking cans because, let's face it; style doesn't always roll shotgun when comfort is at the wheel.

The Razer Orca is made to represent both. It keeps your style on lock while still giving you that 2pm Sunday morning pants optional type of comfort.

Whether you are taunting your gaming opponent across the virtual battle fields or just tuning out on the subway with your music, the Razer



Orca provides extended comfort while keeping your sound pristine and precise.

Technical Details:

- Frequency Response: 15 - 21,000 Hz
- Impedance: 32 Ω at 1kHz
- Input Power: 200 mW
- Drivers: 40 mm, with neodymium magnets
- Cable: 1.2m braided fiber + 2 meter braided extension cable
- Connector: 3.5 mm headphone jack

Hardware Requirements

- Audio device with 3.5mm headphone jack

Razer has given us five sets to giveaway.

For a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Orca* in the subject line and your name and address in the email.

Giveaway is open to Australian residents only.



Chilian film director Patricio Valladeres return after the success with his two first films Curriculum and Dirty Love with his third film. It is called "Toro Loco" and contains the same leading character as his prior film, "Dirty Love" which was released last year.

Written by Patricio Valladares in special collaboration with Andrea Cavaletto. TORO LOCO tells the story of Mateo, (Felipe Avello) son of a notorious mob lord of the city, has been dumped by his wife who took his son away. He doesn't resist the shame and hires the most ruthless hitman available to kill them.

He hires Toro Loco (George Belmar), a cold, eccentric assassin who will bring down destruction on his family. Additional roles in the film are handled by Ignacio Muñoz, Felipe Aliste, Javier Gonzales, Kim Sønnerholm and the director, Patricio Valladeres himself

Toro Loco is a "re-run" of classic action-adventure films like "*Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*" and "*El Mariachi*". The film takes place in one small town in Chile.

Trailer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNQ-3rzpnJ8>

Black Devil Doll Bobblehead Collectible

Cult Collectibles is proud to announce the release of its first "Weird Wobbler" bobblehead style figure from one of the most outrageous underground films ever made: BLACK DEVIL DOLL! Pre-orders are available now with product shipping in September 2010!

The 2008 film is the story of an executed Black militant who is reincarnated into a vicious ventriloquist's puppet, causing endless mayhem and murder (to put it mildly). Widely hailed by cult film aficionados and simultaneously condemned for its overt (yet completely tongue-in-cheek) offensiveness, Art Ettinger of Ultra Violent magazine stated, "*Black Devil Doll is a triumph, seamlessly blending crass un-PC humor with cerebral artistry. The Lewis Brothers deliver one of the most original exploitation films of the new millennium, a singularly unique mix of brain and brawn.*"

Owner of Cult Collectibles, Mark Jason Murray comments, "*I became a tremendous fan of the film even before I saw it and when I started brainstorming what would be the perfect license to launch my toy company, BLACK DEVIL DOLL seemed to be the best fit. Thinking as a collector and fan, this is something that I would love to have in my own collection and since the film character is essentially a "toy" it was an easy choice. From a business perspective, I know the film already has a rabid fan following and that the film's creators would be able to provide an incredible amount of publicity for it right out of the gate. I am also very keen to work with people who I considered friends.*"

The figure was created with great attention to detail while still allowing it to have an identity of its own. "*A lot of time was spent getting the details of the figure just right,*" states Murray. "*It was still important for the figure to appear as a caricature, which the bobblehead format is famous for, but only slightly as anything "cute" would have gone against the character in the film. It's really very accurate, from the subtleties of the facial expression down to its boots.*"

Besides holding a knife in one hand, even further details were included to help bring out the spirit of the film character and one of the film's biggest jokes. "*What started as a simple after-thought during the initial planning of the figure turned out to be one of the figure's best features*

and one of the most difficult to obtain. We wanted the figure to be holding a bucket of "Oakland Fried Chicken" and initially it came back looking like Colonel Sanders on the bucket which was the exact opposite of what it's supposed to look like so after multiple design revisions it finally got to where it needed to be and it brings a whole new level of hilarity to the figure that I am sure fans of the movie will really enjoy. I am very happy with everything about this figure. It was great to work with the creators of the character and film and perhaps we can collaborate on something else in the future."

Murray's company strategy is simple. "I really want to do figures that put Cult Collectibles in a category of its own and this provided me with the ability to do just that. I anticipate the figure will sell out quickly."

Cult Collectibles is already at work on three future limited edition "Weird Wobbler" figures scheduled for release late 2010 or early 2011:

The "Demon Doll" will pay tribute to the Italian horror films of actress Geretta Geretta (Lamberto Bava's *Demons*, Lucio Fulci's *Murderock*, *Rats: Night of Terror* etc)

The "head wound girl" from Lucio Fulci's *The Beyond* (from his film *Cat in the Brain* (in association with *Grindhouse Releasing*)

Black Devil Doll "Weird Wobbler" details:

- Limited edition of 1,000 hand numbered figures
- 7 inches of lightweight polyresin
- housed in a full color retail box designed by Black Devil Doll poster artist, Stephen Romano
- Special exclusive Black Devil Doll trading card available Only during pre-order period through www.cultcollectibles.com

-Pre-orders available now with figure scheduled to ship by mid-September 2010

For more information on Cult Collectibles visit: <http://www.cultcollectibles.com>

For more information on Black Devil Doll visit: <http://www.blackdevildoll.com>



"Too crude"

"Too vulgar"

"Absolutely infantile"

"The best fucking magazine ever"

Royal Flush Magazine gets as many slams as it does accolades, maybe more, but we never set out to make a magazine that sugar coats the facts. If we like something, we'll tell you and if we don't, well, we'll tell you that too. Royal Flush can do this because we are a 100% self-funded, independent magazine that has to answer only to our fans.

In the past fans, friends and family have asked, "How can I help?" and we never had an answer until now. Partnering with Kickstarter we have set up a program that Rewards fans for contributions. Think of it as Pay First, Laugh Later and with a double cover of Rob Zombie and the cast of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, it's already poised to be the best yet. Sprinkle in a little Danny McBride, Al Jaffee, John Waters, Danny Bonaduce, Roger Corman and Cheech & Chong, and we have ourselves a devastating issue.

For as little as \$5 you can not only help Royal Flush, but earn tons of cool and exclusive items ! And you can pre-order it here now!! The outpouring of support has been incredible and we can't thank everyone enough but we have only reached 30% of our goal and unless the full amount is reached, all contributions are returned to the contributors. So, if you are a fan or a friend or just love the amazing talent bundled under one fantastically illustrated cover then please Pay First, Laugh Later!

<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/royalflush/royal-flush-book-seven>



Headzine 2.2

HEADPRESS 2.2 is the second HEADPRESS journal to appear in a digital format as well as a collector edition. Massive thanks to everybody who helped make 2.1 such a resounding success. Over 3000 of you logged on, and the limited edition copies were practically sold out within days. With the latest Headzine, we pick up where we left off, with some of the most blinding, provocative prose going, lovingly cradled by some of the more striking visuals this side of November 9th.

Read the new Headzine:

<http://www.worldheadpress.com/ezine2/>

Buy Collector Edition:

Stamped and Numbered, Full colour and fully illustrated. Hardback Collector Edition limited to 250 copies only.

<http://www.headpress.com/ShowProduct.aspx?ID=100>



Metropolis

Directed by Fritz Lang

Germany, 1927

Reconstructed & Restored, 2010

150 minutes, 1.37:1

Directed by the legendary Fritz Lang (*M*, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*,) it is marked by high production values, incredible special effects, and memorable imagery. A "Holy Grail" among film collectors, *Metropolis* has been released in a newly reconstructed and restored version, thanks to the painstaking archival work of the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung and the discovery of 25 minutes of footage believed lost.

Special Features

- 150-minute reconstructed and restored 2010 version (including 25 minutes of footage previously thought lost to the world)
- separate DVD and BD editions with wraparound embossed sleeve, or Ltd Ed Steelbook Dual Format edition
- Pristine new HD transfer (1080p on Blu-ray)
- New 2010 symphony orchestra studio recording of the original 1927 Gottfried Huppertz score in 5.1
- Newly translated optional English subtitles as well as the original German intertitles
- Full-length audio commentary by David Kalat and Jonathan Rosenbaum
- *Die Reise nach Metropolis* (2010, 53 minutes), a documentary about the film
- 2010 re-release trailer
- 56-page booklet featuring archival interviews with Fritz Lang, a 1927 review by Luis Buñuel, articles by Jonathan Rosenbaum and Karen Naundorf, and restoration notes by Martin Koerber.
- And more!



Something Weird is bringing in the Fall with more Downloads ! Order now! Instant gratification is just a keystroke away!

Web: <http://www.somethingweird.com>

Just some of the amazing titles from Something Weird.

Herschell Gordon Lewis

The Blast-Off Girls
Boinng!
The Girl the Body and the Pill
How to Make a Doll
Jimmy, the Wonder Boy
Just for the Hell of It
Living Venus
The Magicland of Mother Goose
Miss Nymphet's Zap-In
Moonshine Mountain
The Prime Time
The Psychic
Stick It in Your Ear

David F Friedman

The Big Snatch
Diamond Stud
The Fabulous Bastard from Chicago
Love Camp 7
The Pick-Up
Starlet
Thar She Blows
DORIS WISHMAN
Gentlemen Prefer Nature Girls
The Hot Month of August
Keyholes Are for Peeping
Passion Fever
The Sex Perils of Paulette
A Taste of Flesh
Too Much Too Often

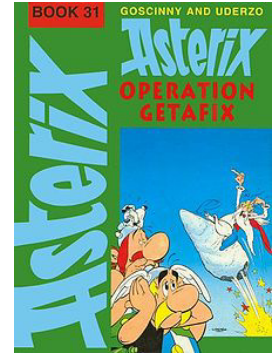
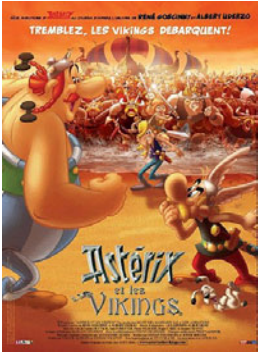
Sexy Shocker !

Censored

Deadly Organ
The Electric Chair
The Flesh & Blood Show
The Girl and the Geek
The Ice House
Invitation to Ruin
Love Captive
Mondo Pazzo
Sex Rituals of the Occult
The Soul Snatcher
A Thousand Pleasures
The Undertaker and his Pals
The Wild and the Naked

Untamed Video

The Amorous Sex
Anatomy of a Psycho
The Beatniks
Born Black
Broadway Jungle
Capture That Capsule
Checkerboard
Cotton Pickin' Chicken Pickers
Daredevil
European Nights
The Flaming Urge
Force of Impulse
Girl on a Chain Gang
Girls of Thunder Strip
Honey Britches
It Won't Rub Off Baby!
It's a Revolution Mother
The Lonely Sex
Malamondo
Man of Steel
Moonshiner's Woman
Mr. Angel
Musical Mutiny
Night of Evil
Night of the Cat
Okeefenokee
Ordered to Love
Pin-Down Girl
& lots more...



ASTERIX THE GAUL

One of the oddest cults in film comes not from a particular genre but, of all places, from France and Belgium. The Asterix series of comic books, films and even computer games has been published in over a hundred languages. The films began as cartoons but have now graduated to live action. Why is the series so popular? The cartoon characters are larger than life, the different nationalities are lampooned mercilessly, and the Latin language is thoroughly done over in a series of puns that have translated surprisingly well into English.

The stories started as a series of French-only comic books written by Rene Goscinny and illustrated by Albert Uderzo. When Goscinny died in 1977 Uderzo also took over the job of writing the stories. The first comic appeared in 1959 and they have appeared regularly ever since.

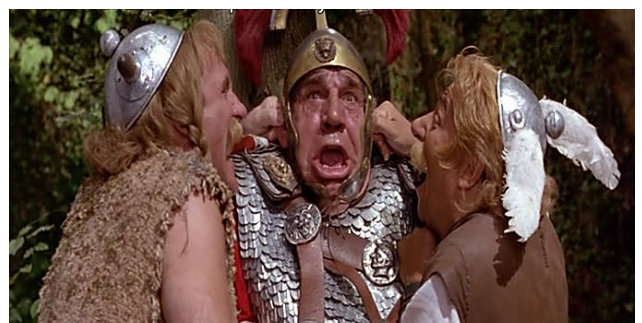
The stories are set in the period when the Romans have conquered the known world – except for one little village in the north of Gaul. According to the films it is “A village of steadfast Gauls, a last holdout against the Roman Empire, sharing mutual respect, harmony and understanding.” Not quite. Most of the stories start with the villagers enjoying a good fight about the freshness of Unhygienix the fishmonger’s fish (or any other excuse that pops up). The village has been able to hold out against the Romans

because of a magic potion brewed by their Druid, Getafix. (This name was later changed to the more politically acceptable Vitamix in the 1989 animated film Asterix and the Big Fight). There are a lot of names ending in the -ix suffix and this is reputedly a tribute to the great French warrior Vercingetorix. The heroes of the stories are the diminutive warrior Asterix, bold and self-confident, his friend Obelix who is a menhir delivery man (a menhir is a huge stone marker used to outline religious places in the Stone Age) and their dog, named naturally Dogmatix. Obelix, unlike the rest of the villagers, does not need to take the magic potion to gain his superhuman strength. As a baby he was accidentally dropped into a vat of potion and absorbed enough that he can now comfortably carry a menhir on his back and a wild boar under his arm. Asterix, however, is the cunning one and the two friends complement each other perfectly.

Other characters such as Cacafonix the Bard (also called Franksinatrix in American releases) and Vitalstatistix the Chief make regular appearances. There are even pirates who will sink their own ship rather than face the Gauls. The Roman soldiers who have come up against the villagers are wisely cautious of getting into a fight with them – an uppercut from a potioned-up villager can send you almost vertically back where you came from. Successive command-



Fish Fight



Fun with Romans



Cacaфонix

ers and even Caesar have not learned this lesson and insist that the village must be taken, so there is plenty of opportunity for the fighting that the villagers love.

Gradually the duo extend their travels to other countries like Britain, Germany and Egypt. The people of each country are depicted in a caricature style that only adds to the humour, and it is done in such a tongue-in-cheek manner that you cannot take offence at it. Part of the international success is due to the voices used to overdub the films for particular markets. For the British overdub, for instance, the voices of such notables as Bill Oddie, Tim Brooke-Taylor, Brian Blessed and Bernard Bresslaw were used. I haven't heard the American dub that uses the voice of Henry Winkler for Asterix.

The stories have kept pace with more modern problems. In *Asterix and the Vikings* we see an examination of the problems of youth with Vitalstatistix's nephew Justforkix as well as a rather neat use of carrier pigeons as a forerunner of the mobile phone SMS service. A matter of debate among fans is whether the three live film



Chief Vitalstatistix



Asterix

versions are better or worse than the eight animated versions. This is always a grey area – after so many comics or books, all done in the same style, it is hard to translate that style into a live character who will meet everyone's expectations. Perhaps it is the extra detail in a live actor's face that detracts a little from the simplicity of the cartoon. It can be done successfully – Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy for instance seemed to satisfy most fans – and I think in the case of the *Asterix* films it has also been done with flair. In a number of the live films such as *Asterix and Obelix Take On Caesar*, for instance, Asterix is played by Gerard Depardieu and Obelix by Christian Clavier. The two actors fit their parts almost perfectly and I had no trouble adapting to the live characters in my own mind.

Following Rene Goscinny's death the ownership of the rights and previous comics was divided. Goscinny asked that the series be discontinued after his death but the fans had other ideas. They petitioned Uderzo to continue and thankfully he did, although it caused strife with the Goscinny family. He also formed a new publishing company to handle future issues. The previous publishers had been bought out and despite the popularity of the series they did not republish any of the older stories. It took a court case to free up the copyrights and assign them all to a new company owned by the Uderzos and Mrs Goscinny. The rights to all the stories have now been sold to Hachette. Hopefully with the publication rights sorted out we can look forward to more adventures.

In Australia the *Asterix* films are distributed by Madman, who currently list nine films and a compilation set.



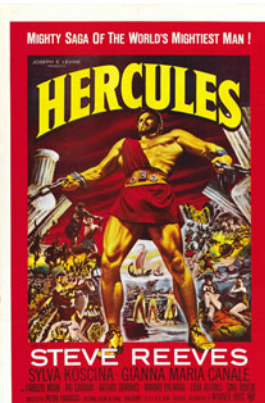
THE WORLD OF SWORD & SANDAL FILMS

Sword and Sandal films are a sub-genre of the historical epic and are primarily concerned with classical, biblical and mythological themes. They have an action adventure focus and at times cross into comedy, cult and even exploitation genres.

While originally of Italian origin they soon became popular in many other countries. The actual title for the Sword and Sandal genre is pepulum (peplos plural) which was first used by a French critic in the early 1960's for the tunic regularly worn in such films.

While it is possible to include such major historical films as *Ben Hur* and *Cleopatra* in this genre, such blockbusters are more regularly placed within the category of historical classics. The term Sword and Sandal is usually used to cover films which are considered low budget, even B grade. In the Italian film industry they were marked by a strong emphasis on gladiatorial themes and the use of body builders as actors.

While film critics argue as to what was the first Sword and Sandal film the 1914 Italian film *Cabiria* includes a muscled-up hero figure and is cited by many as the very first title in the genre. The first major Sword and Sandal film was *Ulysses* (1954) but the genre only achieved world success with *Hercules* (1958), starring American bodybuilder Steve Reeves.



This was followed by the sequel *Hercules Unchained* (1959). Soon the market was flooded with B grade imitations and adaptations. While many had Italian leads, they would adopt English pseudonyms and editors would add in American music and content to achieve success outside the Italian market. An interesting variation within the genre is found in *Kizil Tug Gengis Han* (1960) (*Red Plume Genghis Khan*), a Turkish Sword and Sandal film which dates from around the same period (it is available from Onar Films at www.onarfilms.com).



Red Plume Genghis Khan (1960) The unstoppable force which was the Mongol Empire that cut a swathe from the Pacific to the Mediterranean has always been a great subject for spectacular cinema. While Genghis Khan is significant in this film, he really isn't the prime focus. Ostukarci is a warrior who while having little by the way of wealth makes up for it with dedication to his homeland and his great abilities with the sword. He teams up with Khan to defeat a rival warlord but has no interest in the greater

path of conquest. However, out of respect for Khan Ostukarci agrees to undertake what seems to be a simple mission – to collect some funds promised to Genghis by Seyhyul Gebel of the Ismaels. The plot now becomes intriguing. Seyhyul Gebel is a respected leader but Halit his son is not of the same stock. He lacks discipline and has little ability with the sword. Gebel wishes to marry his son, achieving a union with another significant family as part of the deal. Since Halit obviously will fail in any test of warriorship, Ostukarci agrees to substitute. Luckily they look rather similar.

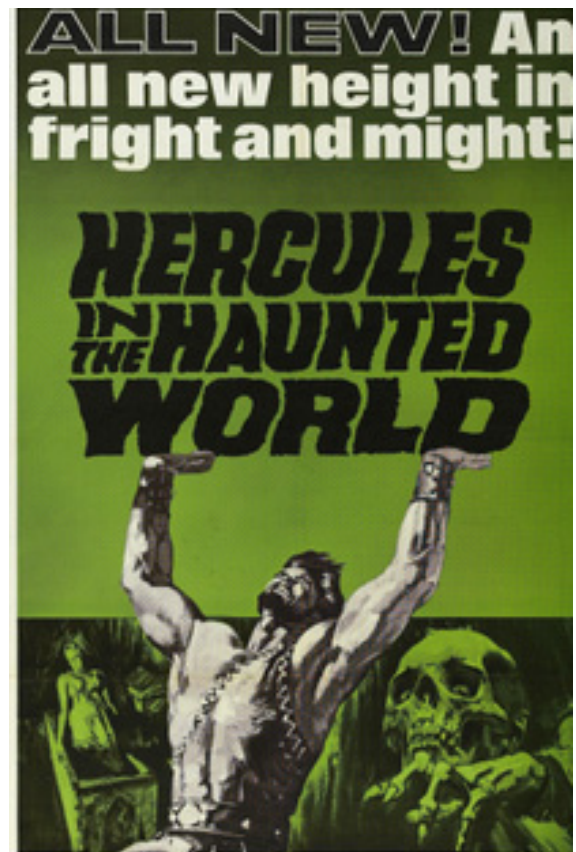
Sadly, this goes horribly wrong, Halit is killed and Ostukarci survives but only with the help of Sabiha, Gebel's daughter. Ostukarci and Sabiha develop an affection for each other, but she is captured when Khan raids Gebel's fortress and when he refuses to release her, the battle begins.

Red Plume Genghis Khan has a solid plot, a fascinating historical basis and if you allow yourself to be taken in by its motifs of warriorship, honour, political machinations, love and loss, you will be impressed. The film has lots of superb swordplay and an amazing climax involving immense armies clashing in an epic battle which is startling in both size and execution.

Sword and Sandal films are marked by focus on stereotypical plots such as the adventures of Hercules, Samson, Goliath and Jason and the Argonauts. They tend to include well-oiled muscular heroes fighting for the attention for a woman in distress. Villains are usually seen as morally bankrupt and this gives the filmmaker a chance to depict belly dancing and eroticism and in some more risqué Sword and Sandal films nudity and sex. When dubbed into English they become even more ridiculous and end up as campy B grade entertainment with unforeseen homoeroticism. At times their content crosses over into cult and exploitation genres.

The Sword and Sandal genre includes a wide range of films which can be divided into various series.

The Hercules series (1957–1965) includes nineteen Hercules films which date from the late Fifties and early Sixties. These were Italian productions with dubbed American releases. Some of the more celebrated actors who played Hercules in these films include Steve Reeves and



Reg Park.

Notable films in this series include *The Labors of Hercules* (Hercules, 1957) starring Steve Reeves and *The Revenge of Hercules* (Goliath and the Dragon, 1960) starring Mark Forest. *Hercules in the Haunted World*, 1961) starring Reg Park and directed by Mario Bava was an unusual entry in that Bava, well known for his horror films and use of violence and sex, created quite an explicit Sword and Sandal epic for the period.

Hercules in the Haunted World (1961) aka *Hercules in the Center of the Earth* and released by Fantoma Films in the U.S is the first uncut edition of the film. Better known as the master of Italian Gothic horror, Bava decided to explore the ever popular "Sword and Sandal" market and created this rather impressive film back in 1961. Bava and his writers, including future Spaghetti Western director Duccio Tessari, turned this into a series of confrontations with monsters, human and otherwise, and in many ways moved the "Sword and Sandal" market into a new direction. This is Hercules with a decidedly Gothic twist.

Hercules (Reg Park) returns to Ecalia to find his love Deinira (Eleonora Ruffo) in a state of

hypnotic trance from which she cannot be awakened. Unbeknown to Hercules she is actually under the control of the Lord Lico (Christopher Lee), who is a servant of the Lord of Evil, Pluto. He is informed by the oracle that the key to freeing her lies with a Golden Apple only found on the island of the Hesperides, a strange world of women banished by the Gods and in a long and perilous journey to the underworld. He must gain the golden apple on the island and proceed to obtain a white magical stone from the world of the dead.

Hercules in the Haunted World is a superb and moody Hercules film. While it begins with the normal fights and male bravado, when they reach Hesperides and ultimately Hades, the film takes a very gothic turn with lots of strange lights, distorted colours, mists, fogs and evocative environments.

The restoration of this film has been especially impressive; the clarity of the picture is quite astounding. The film is presented on the DVD in English or Italian. The Italian language, English subtitled option is preferred as it avoids the banality of the dubbed edition. The rather grand original score of Maestro Armando Trovajoli is also to be noted.



The Maciste series (1960–1965)

There were a total of twenty five Maciste films made during the 1960s sword-and-sandal revival, not including earlier silent titles. When these films were dubbed into English some still included the Maciste name while others were marketed as something different altogether, with Maciste being translated as Samson or even Goliath. The films vary in focus from *Maciste Vs. The Vampire* (1961) marketed in the U.S as *Goliath and the Vampires* to Hercules, Khan and Samson films !

Spanish cult film maker Jess Franco made two Sword and Sandal films which are sadly believed to be lost. The films are *The Erotic Exploits of Maciste in Atlantis* and *Maciste vs. The Amazon Queen* (both starring Val Davis).

The Ursus series (1961–1964)

Ursus is a generic title used for a super strong Roman hero. When dubbed into English it was often translated as Hercules or Son of Hercules. The name originated in *Quo Vadis* (1951), where Ursus was a slave who killed a raging bull by snapping its neck with his bare hands while holding it by the horns.

There were nine Italian films that featured Ursus as the main character including *Ursus*, *Son of Hercules* (1960) and *Ursus the Rebel Gladiator* (1962).

The Samson series (1961–1964)

The Samson character was featured in a series of five Sword and Sandal films made in Italy in the 1960s including *Samson* (1961) and *Samson Vs. The Pirates* (1963).

The Goliath Series (1960–1964)

Goliath was used in Italian Sword and Sandal films to represent a figure of superhero strength placed within a generic Biblical plot. He is not necessarily related to the Goliath of the "David and Goliath" myth while this is sometimes used. Since many of the films were repackaged they moved between different Sword and Sandal categories.

The first Goliath film was actually a traditional Sword and Sandal action film called *Terror of*

the *Barbarians* made in 1959 starring Steve Reeves. It was renamed *Goliath and the Barbarians* in the US and triggered a box office success creating a run on the title. This series included four original Italian Goliath titles and many which were renamed for the marketing opportunity.

The Sons of Hercules (1960s)

The Sons of Hercules was a series of Italian Sword and Sandal films adapted for the U.S. market in the Sixties. They were released on American TV and included fourteen unrelated Italian films brought together with theme songs and a uniform voice-over and introduction relating the main hero in each film to Hercules (often in a not very convincing manner since the original Italian films were unconnected). The titles were strange indeed taking all manner of Italian Sword and Sandal films and packaging them for American TV Appeal. A classic example is how *Maciste, The Strongest Man in the World* became *The Mole Men vs. the Son of Hercules*.



Many of these films are now available as downloads from Something Weird Video (<http://www.somethingweird.com>). These downloads are high quality, reasonable cost and not only include a wide range of Sword and Sandal titles but an incredible range of cult, horror, sex and exploitation films.

The Mole Men Vs. The Son of Hercules (1961) Italian original was *Maciste, The Strongest Man in the World*.

Hercules is a tough dude; he has just harpooned a whale all by himself from the shore and is getting ready to eat it. Sadly he doesn't get a chance to down all that blubber before a group of men arrive screaming and yelling in terror. What is all the commotion about? A new danger has arrived, the Mole Men, albino warriors all dressed in white. Hercules wipes them out but now must track down the rest of them. He traces them to their local outpost where they have tied up a dark skinned warrior and are dancing around him with menacing glances. Hercules frees him and together they team up to fight the Mole Men. This involves being captured and taken to the mole men's underground base which is a large gold-and-diamonds mining operation. The underground city's queen, Halis Mosab, takes a shine to the handsome stranger and chooses him to be her consort if he can meet such challenges as saving the kidnapped Princess Saliura from a gigantic ape. Of course, Hercules kills the ape and but instead of getting down with Halis Mosab carries Saliura back to the world above. The story gets more and more complicated from here on in and I will leave it to you to watch and enjoy the secrets of the Mole Men!



Goliath and the Dragon (1960) original Italian title *The Vendetta of Hercules*.

Goliath must defeat an evil dragon and after fighting all manner of evil gain control of a blood diamond. When he returns home family intrigues, seductive women and an evil ruler prove more of a risk to his life than the dragon ever was! At the same time the costumes are rather lovely, the sets are extravagant, the exterior landscapes are excellent and the rousing score by Les Baxter is melodramatic to say the



Triumph of the Ten Gladiators

least. I especially like the huge puppet like monsters – awesome.

Fire Monsters against the Son of Hercules (1962), original Italian title is *Maciste against the Monsters*, in the U.K it was called *Colossus of the Stone Age*.

A strange tale about the struggle between two pre-historic tribes: the sun and moon worshipers. The sun tribe has decided to settle and live in peace; but alas they choose land claimed by nearby evil moon worshipping Cavemen. Bodybuilder Reg Lewis (as Maciste in Italian or Maxus in English) does not belong to any tribe but he takes a liking to the Sun leader Luciano Marin (as Idar), after saving him and his woman from a sea monster. However the way of friendship and love is never easy and it gets more complicated when Maxus falls in love with Mo-ah, a moon tribe woman. There are some great papier mache monsters and some truly bad costuming, but the masculine antics of Reg Lewis more than make up for it all !

The Italian Gladiator movies (1948-1965)

A very popular Italian Sword and Sandal theme was that of the gladiator. These became extremely popular after the Hollywood blockbuster *Spartacus* (1960) and include such films as *The Ten Gladiators* (1963), *Triumph of the Ten Gladiators* (1965) and many, many others.

Non Heroic Italian sword-and-sandal films (1960s)

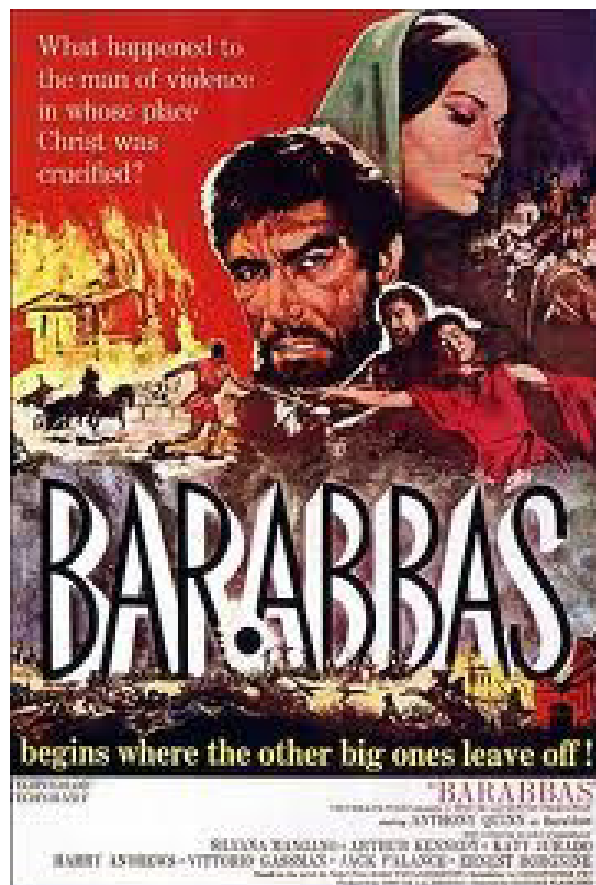
While most Sword and Sandal films focus on the hero, there is a whole class which include



The Minotaur

well known characters but are not traditionally hero driven. These can be extended to include such films as *Robin Hood*, *Ali Baba* and even *The Three Musketeers*.

Just some of the titles in this sub-genre include *Ali Baba and the Sacred Crown* (1962), *Attack of the Moors* (1959), *Barabbas* (1961), *Carthage in Flames* (1959), *Erik the Viking* (1965), *The Golden Arrow* (1962), *Herod, the Great* (1958), *The Last Days of Sodom and Gomorrah*



EXPERIENCE THE FANTASTIC



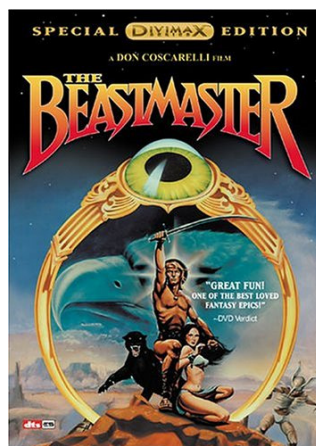
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Presents a CHARLES H. SCHNEER Production "CLASH OF THE TITANS" Starring HARRY HAMLIN as Perseus, JUDI BOWKER as Andromeda, BURGESS MEREDITH, MAGGIE SMITH, URSULA ANDRESS, CLAIRE BLOOM, SIAN PHILLIPS, FLORA ROBSON and LAURENCE OLIVIER as Zeus. Creator of Special Visual Effects RAY HARRYHAUSEN. Music by LAURENCE ROSENTHAL. Written by BEVERLEY CROSS. Produced by CHARLES H. SCHNEER and RAY HARRYHAUSEN. Directed by DESMOND DAVIS.

(1962), *The Minotaur* (1961), *The Queen of Sheba* (1953), *The Revenge of Spartacus* (1964) and many others. An unusual addition is *Kizil Tug Gengis Han* (1960), a Turkish Sword and Sandal based on Genghis Khan (Onar Films <http://www.onarfilms.com>)

Later Sword and Sandal films from the 1980s

From the Sixties to the Eighties Sword and Sandal was not the most popular of genre. This was the time of James Bond and spy films, Westerns and Spaghetti Westerns and very few Sword and Sandal titles were made. Ray Harryhausen's *Clash of the Titans* (1981) achieved a great success but was hard to imitate due to its high level of special effects.

What did become popular was the sub-genre of Sword and Sorcery

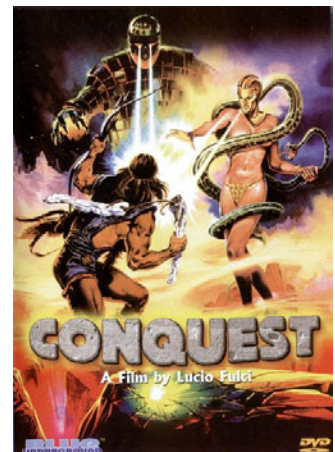


The magic bow in Conquest

which packed in the sex and violence to add flair to the now rather tame Sword and Sandal mix. The first film to kick off the fad was *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) followed by *Conan the Destroyer* (1984). Conan triggered a whole flood of similar films with such titles as *Ator the Invincible* (1983), *Beastmaster* (1982), *Conquest* (1984), *Ironmaster* (1983) and many others.

Conquest (1983)

Blue Underground DVD Lucio Fulci is considered by many to be a great horror film maker. While most of his best known films date from the 70s and 80s their violence, strong gore and strange occult themes still make them a great success with devotees of the strange. Although



enjoying a prolific career throughout the '50s, '60s and '70s, it wasn't until his international success with *Zombie* in 1979 that he would reach the height of success. *Zombie* was the first of a series of horror triumphs over the next three years - *City of the Living Dead* (1980),



The Beyond and *House by the Cemetery* (1981), and *The New York Ripper* (1982).

Determined not be to pigeonholed and to tap into the growing cult success of Sword and Sorcery films, Fulci produced *Conquest*. *Conquest* was quite an expensive production with a lot of special effects, costumes and exotic locations. Sad to say it was a major disaster.

It is very difficult to explain what this film is all about. It begins abruptly with a strange confusing scene full of colours and lights where a rather sexy young warrior named Ilias is presented with a magical bow. He goes on his mythic journey and when attacked, is defended by a Mace, a wanderer of the wasteland whose claim to fame is that no man is his friend.

While together they wander the countryside protecting themselves from all manner of strange creatures, a local evil sorceress named Ocron is having dreams regarding her own death at the hands of a faceless warrior. When she hears of a man with a strange and powerful magical bow she decides she must have him killed and take the bow for herself. She sends all manner of creatures to retrieve Ilias and his weapon and this is the way the story unfolds. Every weird creature you can think off, the undead, what look like werewolves, zombie dead who live near the ocean and so on. They battle and battle until the obvious climax.

This is a very silly Sword and Sorcery film. The acting is appalling, the creatures are pretty unbelievable and the film looks like it was made with a constant smear of Vaseline over the lens. The women are constantly near naked and horny and Ocron seems to spend a lot of time rolling around with a snake.

The soundtrack is totally over the top, a driving electronic rock soundscape which overpowers every scene. This is one weird experience. There are snippets of the old horror Fulci here and there but nothing especially impressive.

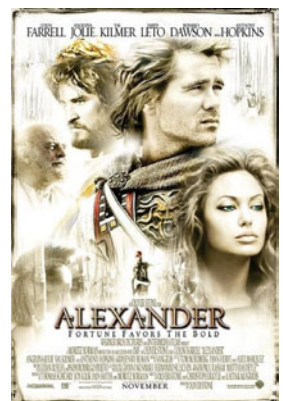
After you get used to the rhythm of the strange madness of *Conquest* it does grow on you. After about an hour you leave the plot behind and just enjoy the ride...in the end I liked it, but I am not quite sure why !



Scene from Alexander

The Modern Era

Sword and Sandal films have had a major influence on Hollywood and on indie filmmaking. *Gladiator* (2000) created a renewed interest in Roman and classical historical films and was followed by such films as *Alexander* (2004), *Troy* (2004) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005).



On the B Grade front recent Sword and Sandal releases are *The Pagan Queen* (2010) and *Hell Hounds* (2010).

The Pagan Queen (Amok Films 2010), is based on the legend of 8th Century Queen Libuse in the area roughly known as Bohemia. In these days it was a loose collection of villages and small agricultural areas set in the great European forest. Libuse's reign, however, marks the beginning of massive change for her country and her people. Invaders are moving into the area and she must initiate some of these changes herself for her people to survive. With so many men in the army she must buy in food. To raise money for this she allows the





noblemen to open mines, which pollute the rivers and in turn lower the agricultural production.

The noblemen feel it is time for her to marry. Assassinating Libuse is not really an option – she is protected by her lifelong friend Vlasta who leads a team of Amazons. The nobles believe the people will more readily follow a man than a woman into battle. Of course, her husband would become king and gain power while she produces an heir. Instead of marrying a noble Libuse decides to marry a long-term lover, a commoner ploughman named Premysl.

He is not happy with the arrangement and threatens that he will rule the country with an iron fist. This he does and power gradually passes from Libuse to him. He does, however, consolidate the country and makes it safer from invaders.

Libuse is the daughter of a forest elf and has the ability to see into the future. She has foreseen a great city being built in her country, but such a city will mean more food will be needed to support it. This in turn will mean the destruction of the great forests. Her husband proceeds ruthlessly to force changes on the country and Libuse is becoming concerned at what she has set in motion. Her people are becoming little more than slaves of the king and the forests from which she draws her power are disappearing. Can she reverse the destruction, or is it too late?

The film is a story of conflict between the old ways and the new and between men and women. It is sad in that it highlights the need for a ruler to surrender their own life and loves for the benefit of their people. It still maintains an element of hope, though, in Libuse's vision of the great new city that became Prague.



Scene from *Hellhounds*

Filmed in the remaining ancient forests, the film has a look of authenticity about it that is lacking in too many of the more glamorous films of the same genre.

Hellhounds is a nice Sword and Sandal drama from Sony (2010). What can you say about a “sword and sandal” epic set somewhere in ancient Greece, where the actors speak with English, Scottish or American accents, and the whole lot is filmed in Romania?



Hellhounds is not too bad. It is nicely filmed, the plot works well, the actors are competent and dressed in short leather skirts. Even the CGI is kept to a minimum and what there is well done.

Kleitos is in love with Demetria. So is his friend Nikandros. Nikandros poisons her and she is sent to Hades where she is to become the bride of the Lord of Hades unless they can rescue her within three days. Hades is guarded by hellhounds. Kleitos, Nikandros, and their friends Theron and Andronicus have to hack and slash their way into Hades then fight their way back out again with Demetria. If she can be reunited with her body within three days she will be re-born. They are, naturally, betrayed by Nikandros. He is given control of the hellhounds to leave Hades and hunt them down.

The film has a slightly budget look in that there are many outside scenes and the other sets look fairly basic but overall it works. It also manages to avoid the almost caricature look of so many films of this genre. It won't be a blockbuster but it is good entertainment.



Reg: And what have they ever given us in return?

Reg: All right, but apart from the sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh water system and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?

Attendee: Brought peace?

Reg: Oh, peace - shut up!

Reg: There is not one of us who would not gladly suffer death to rid this country of the Romans once and for all.

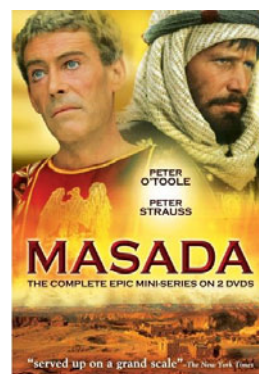
Dissenter: Uh, well, one.

Monty Python's Life of Brian

Introduction

The depiction of Rome in cinema is a reflection of our cultural ambivalence to this epic civilisation. On one hand you have the great legacy Rome has left on our heritage, law and customs and yet you also have the machinations of a political empire which regularly used brutality as a means to an end. Since cinema has so often been influenced by Christian values, you have Rome depicted as both as the evil persecutor of a growing faith and later as the protector of early Catholicism, a strange contradiction indeed. The conflict between Christian and pagan values has been regularly played out with the normal spin which sees the evil pagans as

suppressing the loving values of a small Christian sect. Rome's role in Judea could be interpreted as a civilizing force with the zealots acting as terrorists or as an occupying force and the zealots as freedom fighters. As one would expect TV series such as *Masada* (1981) take the side of



the zealots and even had various Christian evangelists holding fundraisers for the production of the film. I think the most objective view of Rome in Judea is found in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* "What have the Romans ever done for us?" scene. As the zealots argue between themselves about fighting against the Roman state they find themselves agreeing that Rome has brought sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh water system and public health as well as making the streets safe to walk at night!

The cinematic depiction of the supposed Life of Jesus has also had a significant influence on our perception of Rome. Images range include the bungling King Herod, the whipping of Jesus, the soldiers gambling over his clothes and the crucifixion. While there is little historical

evidence for the accounts of the gospels their resonance through our culture through constant repetition has had a lasting effect on the way Rome is represented in cinema.

Rome is depicted as everything from a great empire to the plaything of debauched emperors, from a benevolent multifaceted kingdom which allowed conquered states to sustain their own customs to a suppressor of the free. It all depends on where you stand; one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist.

Roman epics were primarily made by the film industries of Italy, the United States, and Britain. When it comes to classifying such films by genre there are many difficulties. The major debate is where "Sword and Sandal" films end and epic cinema begins. Most of the early epics (especially from Italy) were Sword and Sandal and the dividing line between Sword and Sandal and epic cinema seems to be arbitrarily based on budget. Sword and Sandal films were generally low budget while the epics usually came with a higher price tag, compared to the cost of films currently made in Hollywood both genres would be considered low budget today.

Many of the films also drift into cult and exploitation territory especially when it comes to emperors Caligula and Nero. It seems that when we want to explore the dark side of the human psyche as well as sexual excess we need an excuse and so use historical figures to justify such a portrayal on screen. Both Nero and Caligula may have been madman, but it seems that on screen their indulgences are magnified so we can revel in their perversities safe in the knowledge that we are simply watching history. In the case of Caligula, he has more exploitation films made in his name than any other. He pro-



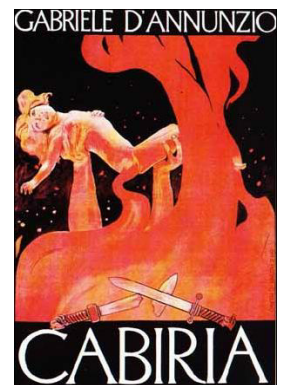
Quo Vadis? (1912)

vides the ultimate excuse to portray all forms of sexual expression; just how much of this reflects historical reality is anyone's guess but it can be lots of fun to watch.

Early Roman Epics

Quo Vadis? (1912) by Enrico Guazzoni was based on Henryk Sienkiewicz's famous novel which depicted Christian heroism in a pagan Rome ruled over by Nero. The movie version sported lavish sets, indulgent pagans and courageous Christians and was quite an international success.

Cabiria (1914) by Giovanni Pastrone is considered the first major epic on ancient Rome. It is set in the pre-Christian era of the Punic Wars (264-146 B.C.) and is nationalist in content. It is a little known film yet had a strong effect on D.W. Griffith and indeed on the development of the whole of Hollywood.



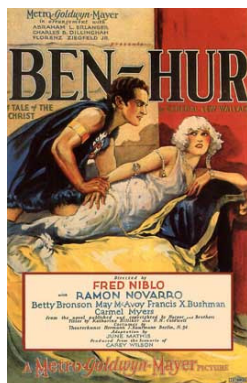
Between 1905 and 1926, Italian filmmakers made at least nineteen films based on historical themes, overwhelmingly about Rome including *Pompei* (1910), *Quo Vadis?* (1912), *Cabiria* (1914) and *Giulio Cesare* (1914). Many commentators see the focus on Rome as due to the unification of Rome in 1871 and the development of nationalism as a primary focus within the new Italian state. World War I virtually ended Italian Roman epics and only a small few were produced between 1920 and 1939 and these tended to be very low budget. The domain of the Roman epic moved to Hollywood which could afford the expense of making such films, these were produced throughout the 1920's and thirties, reaching their peak in the 1960s.

As cultural change brought about the demise of the historical epic in Hollywood, the film industry in Italy became more interested in Giallo (Italian crime films), James Bond knock-offs (Eurospy), neo realism and art films and the nail was seemingly driven into the coffin of the Roman Epic.

In the Seventies *I Claudius*, a BBC television series triggered much interest and this was followed in the early Eighties by *Clash of the Titans* (1981) which brought about a flood of historical fantasy films. *Clash of the Titans* was a great success primarily due to the special effects by Ray Harryhausen. However the advent of the *Conan* films (1982/1984) and way too many imitations triggered a new interest in historical epics, albeit of a fantasy type. This revival coincided with the opening of the market to adult cinema and the birth of home video and this created a market for Roman exploitation cinema. Beginning with the controversial Penthouse film *Caligula* (1984) the market was flooded with what could be easily defined as Roman porn with everything from wild bi-sexual orgies to horse sex. It wasn't until *Gladiator* (2000) that the more traditional Roman epic returned to the big screen.

Epics

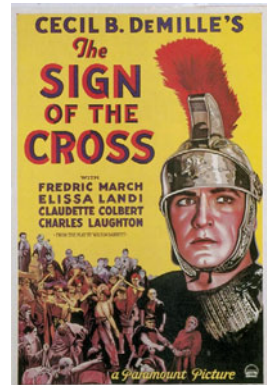
Ben Hur (1925) was one of the most celebrated pre-sound Roman historical epics made in Hollywood. It was directed by Fred Niblo with Francis X. Bushman as Messala and Ramón Novarro as Ben Hur. It was made by the newly formed MGM and became one of their first true blockbusters. The plot centres on the friendship and later clash between Ben Hur, a wealthy Jew and his boyhood friend, the Roman Tribune Messala. Sadly Messala has become rich, arrogant and corrupt and when an accident leads to Ben Hur being charged with treason, Messala makes sure Ben Hur and his family are jailed and separated. Ben Hur is sent to slave away in the galley of a Roman warship. Along the way he unknowingly encounters a carpenter's son (yes, you guessed it: Christ) who offers him water. Once aboard ship, his resilience and inner strength impresses the Roman admiral, Quintus Arrius, who allows him to remain unchained. Of course this works in Arrius' favour when the ship is attacked and sunk by pirates and he is saved by Ben Hur. Ben Hur is now treated like a son by Arrius and becomes a celebrated chariot racer. As you can imagine this leads to conflict with Messala. The climax of the film, however, is the



sentimental reunion of Ben Hur with his family but by now he is suffering from leprosy. Of course that damn son of a carpenter pops up again and heals him !!

In a time not known for animal protection. The director ran real chariot races in Italy to get the most from the chariot scenes with some 100 horses killed during filming. It was the last historical epic made in the pre sound period.

The Sign of the Cross (1932) by Cecil B. DeMille took his immense sense of style and cinematography and combined it with an inflammatory tale of Christian courage and devotion in juxtaposition to Roman paganism and decadence. Claudette Colbert played the empress Poppaea and Charles Laughton played Nero.



The film was surprisingly explicit for its period with comprehensive coverage of the violence of the Roman games and even some startling eroticism including an orgy which includes obvious lesbian overtones. Of course all this violence and sexuality was simply to emphasize the crude and base nature of Rome and in turn, inform the audience of the great moral sacrifice which was made by the Christians as they went to the lions. (Interestingly, current historical research documents criminals being sent to battle the lions in the games, but there is no specific records showing Christians were treated in such a manner).

Cleopatra (1934) was DeMille's next Roman film which had Cleopatra played by Claudette Colbert and Mark Antony by the English actor Henry Wilcoxon. While a nice looking film, DeMille simplified the history and created a tale which simply focused on forbidden love and the dangers of untrammelled power mixed with ambition.

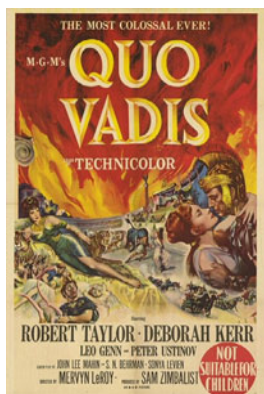
The Defeat of Hannibal (1937) aka *Scipione l'Africano*. Directed by Carmine Gallone it offers an admiring portrayal of Scipio Africanus the Elder who defeated Hannibal and the Carthaginians at the Battle of Zama in 202 B.C. It was

an extremely patriotic work which borders on propaganda seemingly working hard to favourably compare Scipio Africanus with Mussolini. Indeed the film itself was actively supervised by Mussolini's son Vittorio. The film cost about 12.6 million lira, the most ever spent on an Italian film before the war and used some 6000 extras in the battle scenes.

Caesar and Cleopatra (1948) was directed by Gabriel Pascal and based on the play by George Bernard Shaw. It is considered one of the most expensive productions made in the United Kingdom and was certainly lavish in both sets and cast. It starred Claude Rains, Vivien Leigh, and Stewart Granger and was marked by Shaw's witty dialogue and an impressive plot.



Quo Vadis ? (1951) directed Mervyn Le Roy's sumptuous starring Robert Taylor, Deborah Kerr, and Peter Ustinov as Nero. While quite an astounding film in regards to cinematography and visuals, it is full of bad dialogue and a plot which is overblown. Ustinov steals the show with a very camp performance of Nero which is so over the top it makes all other actors look insignificant. In many ways his over-the-top performance destroys any serious themes which the film tries to cover.

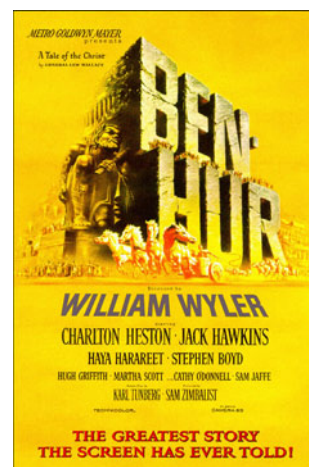


Julius Caesar (1953) is a little known black and white British film based on Shakespeare and directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. It has a stellar cast of James Mason, Marlon Brando and John Gielgud which turn a low budget film into quite an performance.

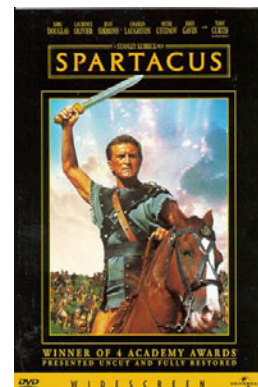
The Robe (1953) was the first Cinemascope production. It was directed by Henry Koser and starred Richard Burton and Jean Simmons. The story is a traditional Roman epic love tale with a

pagan soldier falling in love with a Christian girl. It is not especially memorable. Its sequel was *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954).

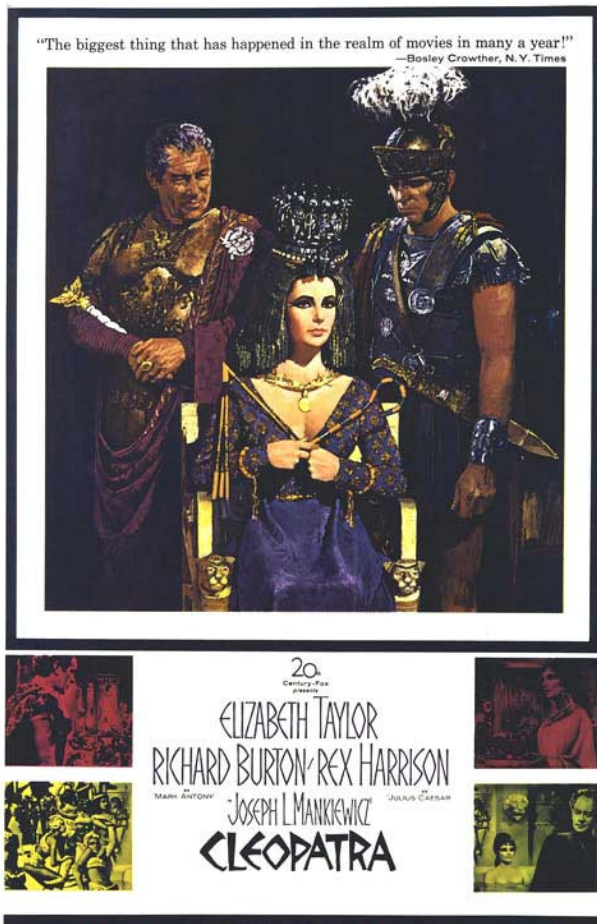
Ben Hur (1959) directed by William Wyler was the most famous of the three adaptations of the tale. Ben Hur a merchant of Jerusalem meets his childhood friend, Messala, who has returned to Jerusalem as the commanding officer of the Roman army. Unfortunately, things don't go to plan and they turn against each other. When an accident occurs, Ben Hur loses his property with his family sent to prison. He lands on a Roman galley. Of course Ben Hur faces each of these hardships with honour and integrity and returns to Jerusalem as a respected Roman citizen, reunited with his family and ready to face-off with Messala. The movie won eleven academy awards. Charlton Heston played the character of Ben Hur and Stephen Boyd was Messala.



Spartacus (1960) was directed by Stanley Kubrick with the screenplay written by the Dalton Trumbo. Spartacus was played by Kirk Douglas with other actors such as Laurence Olivier, Charles Laughton, Jean Simmons, Peter Ustinov, Tony Curtis, John Gavin, Nina Foch, Herbert Lom, Charles McGraw, John Ireland and Nick Dennis in supporting roles. It was based on a novel by Howard Fast and had a strong left leaning message. It tells the story of the gladiator who led a massive slave revolt during 73 to 71 B.C.



The aristocrats are depicted as haughty and out of touch while the revolutionaries are seen as communally based peace lovers only driven to fight by circumstance. Due to the controversial nature of Spartacus many battle scenes and much dialogue was cut and some scenes never made it past the planning stage. Other cen-



sored scenes especially those involving nudity and homosexuality have only recently been restored in the recent DVD and Blu Ray editions of the film.

Cleopatra (1963) was directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz with Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra and Richard Burton as Mark Antony and Rex Harrison as Caesar. An extremely expensive Hollywood epic which while filled with historical detail is such a florid love story that it failed at the box office and in many ways heralded the



end of the Hollywood historical epic for quite some time.

The Fall of the Roman Empire (1964) was directed by Anthony Mann and featuring Alec Guinness, Stephen Boyd, Christopher Plummer, and Sophia Loren. It is considered one of the more unusual Roman epics in that it choose a period not often explored in Roman epic cinema and included well founded historical research. The film explores events which supposed occurred during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and his son and successor Commodus.

The film is still celebrated for its exploration of this period of Roman history. It included some truly amazing sets and design, but was let down by a somewhat weak script and some uneven performances.

Satyricon (1969) directed by Fredrico Fellini is a film which is very hard to categorize. It is certainly not a historical epic and while having elements of eroticism, cannot really be placed within the cult or exploitation genre. It would be fair to suggest it is an art film which has taken inspiration from the work of the same name by Petronius Arbiter. The origins of satirical and bawdy during the reign of the emperor Nero in Rome which only survived



Fellini took the fragments and created what is essentially an erotic “fairy tale” for a mature audience that is still challenging and entertaining today. In *Comments on Film*, Fellini explained that his goal in adapting Petronius's classic was “*to eliminate the borderline between dream and*



Satyricon

imagination: to invent everything and then to objectify the fantasy; to get some distance from it in order to explore it as something all of a piece and unknowable" and Satyricon is a testament to such an exploration.

Comedies

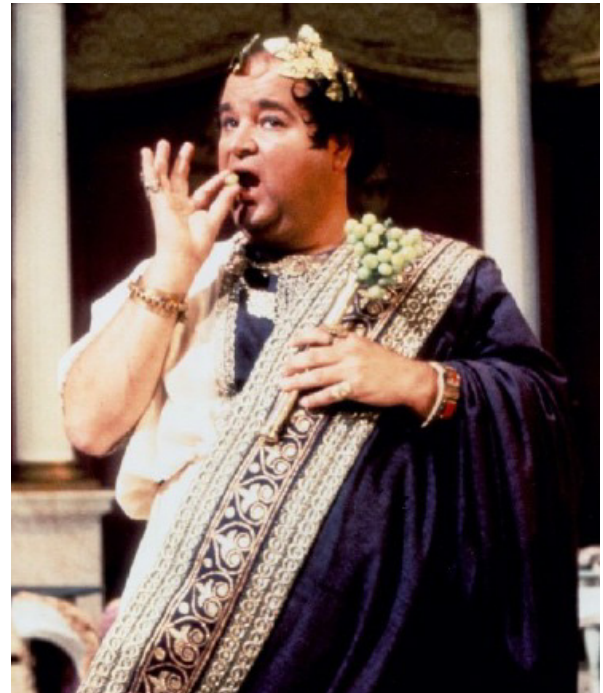
Carry On Cleo (1965) was the tenth film in the *Carry On* series and offered a parody of Cleopatra, set in the reign of Julius Caesar. Kenneth Williams as Caesar proved outrageously camp and witty and the script was actually a lot better than many of the other *Carry On* titles. The costumes and sets used in the film were also exceptional, having become available from the production of *Cleopatra* (1963) starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor after that production moved to Rome.



A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (1966) was a highly successful musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. It was based on a book by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart, while being inspired by the very bawdy farces of the ancient Roman playwright Plautus (251–183 BC). It was directed on the big screen by Richard Lester with Zero Mostel and Jack Gilford reprising their stage roles. It also featured Buster Keaton in his last motion picture role. The film was presented as an American "Carry On" film and did not impress Sondheim since most of the songs were cut from the film though it was well received by the public.



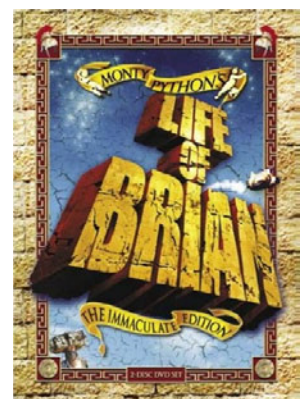
A History of the World Part 1 (1981) was written, produced and directed by Mel Brooks. The Roman section (which is part three) is one of the longest of the film. It stars Brooks as Comicus a stand-up comedian part time philosopher who



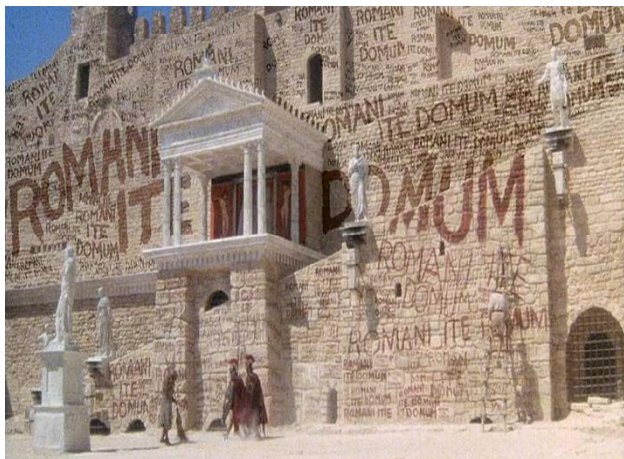
**Dom DeLuise as Caesar in Mel Brook's
History of the World Part I**

has, after many years, got the best gig in town, Caesar's palace. On the way to the palace Comicus meets and falls in lust with a Vestal Virgin named Miriam and befriends an Ethiopian slave named Josephus. Josephus is later conscripted into the service of the Empress Nympho due to his impressive endowment.

At the Palace Emperor Caesar (played superbly by Dom DeLuise) enjoys Comicus' performance, until Comicus gets carried away and starts making jokes about the emperor's obesity and corruption within the government. Josephus is so worried about his friend that he accidentally pours wine into the emperor's lap. In retribution Caesar orders Comicus and Josephus to fight a gladiatorial battle, however, they use the weapons they are given to fight their way out of the palace. The laughs keep coming with lots of drug jokes and Comicus landing in a private room where the Last Supper is not only taking place but being painted by Leonardo da Vinci.

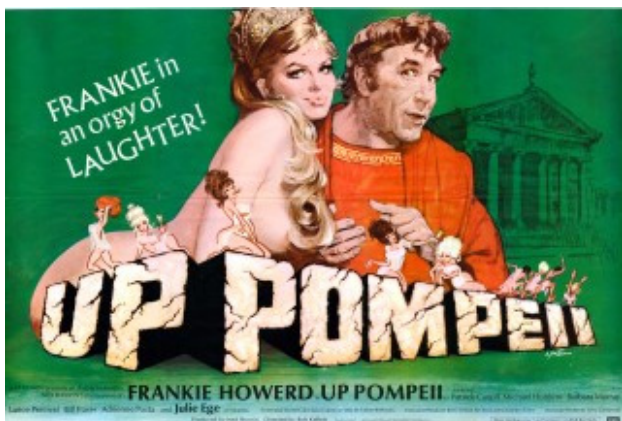


Monty Python's Life of Brian (1970) While not essentially a Roman epic film, it does



Roman's go home (Romani Ite Domum) in Life of Brian

include a lot of Roman themes since it covers the Roman occupation of Judea. Some especially amusing scenes including the "What have the Romans ever done for us" scene and the scene where Brian is caught writing a political slogan on the city walls and the centurion corrects his Latin like a schoolmaster and demands he writes Roman's go home (*Romani Ite Domum*) a hundred times !

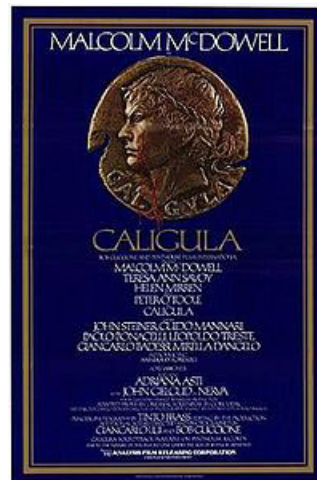


Up Pompeii (1971) is quirky bawdy comedy which has Nero still reigning ten years beyond his historical lifespan. Frankie Howerd plays the character one would expect from him and the film is filled with double entendre and dirty jokes. After appearing in a couple of *Carry On* films this was his own take on the genre and is only moderately successful.

Roman slave Lurkio accidentally becomes the possessor of a scroll naming the proposed assassins of the Emperor Nero. While running an orgy for his master things get far worse when Mount Vesuvius erupts.

Exploitation & Erotica

The world of film was changed forever by *Caligula*, a film which was meant to revolutionize adult entertainment. It was a bizarre film which was wracked with legal action, censorship and controversy everywhere it was shown.



Funded by Bob Guccione of Penthouse with a script written by Gore Vidal based on a work originally written by Roberto Rossellini. In 1975 Tinto Brass, the Italian erotic filmmaker took on the role as director. Problems began to surface as early as 1976 when Vidal resigned due to constant interference with his role as scriptwriter. Various legal cases ensued. Set construction was overseen by Danilo Donati, a four time Academy award winning designer. The film had quite astonishing sets, sixty four in all with 3,592 costumes. The aim was to create a reasonably historical credible historical epic with hard core content. The film was shot in Rome under strict secrecy to avoid media scrutiny. The cast was a stellar one including Sir John Gielgud, Peter O'Toole, Helen Mirren and Malcolm McDowell. As time went on clashes began to develop between Brass and Guccione. Guccione had obviously not critically watched many of Brass' earlier films. While Brass certainly made erotica



Malcolm McDowell as Caligula



Imperial orgy– Penthouse style

many of his films were more in the exploitation than erotica genre, *Salon Kitty* (1976) being a prime example.

Accordingly, without the knowledge of Brass Guccione went back to the studio with cinematographer Giancarlo Lui, thirteen Penthouse Pets, small crew and minimal equipment to reshoot more hard core footage. He created such memorable scenes as the lesbian tryst and the Imperial orgy as well as various others. He was able to bring many of the actors back from the original to work with the Penthouse Pets to avoid continuity difficulties. However, this resulted in all sorts of battles began including legal suits, threats from unions, resignations and many edits.

The first showing was at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival. Due to its pornographic nature it was shut down after only a few days and the controversy about the film began. There were constant ratings battles with many countries banning the film outright. Over the lifetime of the movie thus far there have been some thirteen different versions. In 2007 *Caligula: The Imperial Edition* (Image Entertainment USA) was released which includes three DVDs and is considered the most complete edition ever available. The original Cannes film edition is believed to be lost and does not survive even in bootleg form.

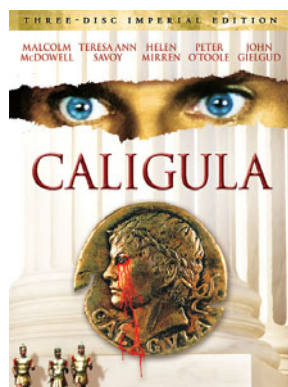
Caligula was not well received. Viewers wanting

porn did not think the film had enough sex, while viewers wanting an historical epic were shocked by the explicit content. The mixture of sex and violence horrified the censors and it was banned in the UK and Australia for many years. It is still viewed with ambiguity by reviewers since it is such a strange amalgam of hard core erotica, exploitation film and historical epic. The film did eventually reach a large audience due to the advent of the home video tape. Adult films were hot sellers on video as people could watch XXX titles in the privacy of their own home. *Caligula* rented and sold well due to its developing reputation as a exploitation classic and became a favourite with cult film lovers worldwide. In response to its success in the home video market a flood of Rome inspired cult and exploitation titles hit the shelves.

The Gestapo's Last Orgy aka *Last Orgy of the Third Reich* (1976) was shot around the same time as *Caligula*. It has nothing to do with Rome at all and is essentially a Nazi exploitation film. It is worth noting as it was renamed "*Caligula reincarnated as Hitler*" and re-released as such in 1977 to cash in on the Penthouse *Caligula* film.

Messalina! Messalina! (1977) was directed by Bruno Corbucci with sets designed by Danilo Donati who also designed the sets for the Penthouse film. The story of *Messalina! Messalina!* is really quite amazing. Franco Rossellini, who was the co-producer of *Caligula*, realized the controversy regarding *Caligula* and was worried he may not recover his costs. So knowing that the Guccione crew were leaving the Dear Studios in Rome he assembled his own team, got some financing together and decided to make his own quickie Roman epic using the sets and gear which were on hand.

Rossellini wrote the script with Mario Amendola. It tries to emulate *Caligula* with sex, nudity and gore but doesn't really come close. Its title was later changed to *Caligula II* aka *Messalina: Sins of Rome* when *Caligula* became a major



success on home video.

Hot Nights of Caligula (1977) directed by Roberto Bianchi Montero was essentially a bawdy sex comedy with some semi-hard core content.

Caligula: The Untold Story aka *Caligula II- The Forbidden Story* (1982). *Caligula II* is an amazing sleaze fest from Joe D'Amato starting David Brandon as Caligula and the beautiful Laura Gemser. The film has been released in Germany and Italy uncut, but not in the UK, Australia or the US. This is certainly a superb, sleazy and outrageous work of cinema, offering two hours of truly astounding sex, violence and perversity; it is a cult film par excellence.

Joe D'Amato, master of low budget exploitation, takes on the mantle of *Caligula* after the fame of the Tinto Brass/Penthouse release and makes a film which is clearly not a sequel but a film which takes inspiration from the legend to create a true exploration of depravity. D'Amato himself sets the stage through the prologue. "*Caligula (Gaius Caesar) murdered his adopted grandfather Tiberius to assume power. He committed Incest with his sisters, adultery with his friends wives, pederasty, flaunted the law and was a glutton, pervert and epileptic*". Quite a lot to live up to but D'Amato rises to the occasion and does fairly well !

The film opens with an assassination attempt,



Laura Gemser in Caligula II



Debauchery D'Amato style in Caligula II

which is rather fun since the assassin is no other than Michele Soavi (another cult film maker) playing Domitius. Caligula catches him just in time and rather than killing him off, has his tendons cut and his tongue excised so he can keep him as a plaything.

As the film develops we find Caligula at his very best attempting to have his way with a virtuous young Christian girl who kills herself rather than submitting to Caligula's wicked desires. This triggers a story of love, lust and revenge. Her friend and lover, the Moorish Priestess Miriam (played by Laura Gemser), deflowers herself in front of a statue of Anubis and sets herself on the task of getting very close to Caligula so she may take revenge for her friend's death.

However, before this startling, but totally fictional, plot unfolds Caligula must find funds to support the re-development of his palace and so stages a grand orgy. To get enough young girls, he has the Vestal Virgins trained for the role. They are inspected, deflowered in an underwater scene and then taught the skills of sex on a hunky Greek boy by an aging Roman transvestite. At the same time, of course, we are entertained by Caligula's bi-sexual tastes with sex and nudity galore. While most of these scenes are soft erotica, they occasionally blur into explicit sex, until the orgy scene itself hits and wallop; there is an outburst of 30 minutes of explicit sex you will not easier forget.

The orgy scene is startling and filled with all manner of sexual content. We have explicit sex of all forms including dwarves and horse fondling. There is even an armed gladiatorial match with blood splattered over the copulating revellers and a senator continuously vomiting during sex play. This is certainly an extreme and excessive presentation, so utterly over the top it is riveting exploitation cinema.



Caligula's madness deteriorates when Miriam stops an assassination attempt on his life (as she wants to take her own revenge) and Caligula must punish the plotters. This involves an explosion of violence which includes smashing a baby against a brick wall, long metal rods rammed up behinds and Senators forced to kill women and children to save their own skin. Miriam drugs Caligula's wine and as his hallucinations increase his dreams of murdered foes begin to haunt every moment of his day.

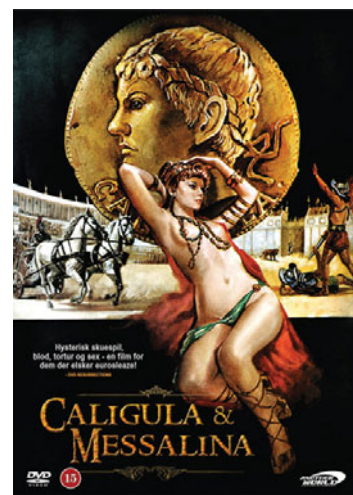
D'Amato has certainly pulled out all the stops in this one with more sex, gore, violence and perversity than in most libraries of cult films. This is certainly a film which is not for the timid, but if you are sick enough to dare, it is well worth the effort to get a copy.

D'Amato continued his Roman exploitation films in the Nineties with *The Orgies of Messalina* aka *Messalina: The Virgin Empress* (1996) and *Caligula: The Deviant Emperor* (1997).

Caligula and Messalina aka *Caligula's Perversions* (1982) Directed by Bruno Mattei. Bruno Mattei has been called the "Ed Wood" of Italian sleaze cinema and not without good reason. During the Sixties he learnt his trade by working under other Italian directors as an editor and his first directorial experience was in the creation of around half an hour of XXX footage for Jess

Franco's explosive 1969 classic *99 Women*. His first full length films were *SS Girls* (1977) and *SS Extermination Love Camp* (1977). These were followed by a couple of Nunsplottation titles. His best known work is his horror classic *Hell of the Living Dead* (1980).

In 1978 he released *Caligula's Perversions* aka *Caligula and Messalina* to cash in on the notoriety of *Caligula*. The uncut edition is around 111 minutes but is hard to find. The generally available edition is soft core and around 97 minutes. The difference is primarily explicit sex. The laser universe edition from Germany is uncut but out of print, the Another World Entertainment edition from Denmark comes in at 97 minutes.



John Turner plays the insane Roman Emperor Caligula, who commits incest with his sisters, rapes a nearly married couple, turns his horse into a member of the Senate, and kills anyone he perceives as a threat. Messalina (played by the attractive but acting challenged Betty Roland) has been trained sexually by her mother and waits her chance to get her hands on the emperor. When his slutty sisters are exiled, she proves her strength in a gladiatorial match and makes it into the emperor's bed. While the film explores all manner of Caligula's excess, it also moves past his execution to Messalina's relationship with the new emperor Claudius and her obvious infidelities.

While there have been many good quality B grade "Roman films" this is not the best of them. This is very low budget with terrible acting and most scenes created simply as an excuse for showing all sorts of sex. Now there is nothing wrong with that but it does make the more readily "cut" edition utterly useless.

Caligula Reincarnated as Nero aka *Nero & Poppea: An Orgy of Power* and *Messalina 2* (1982) directed by Antonio Passalia and Bruno

Mattei was a quick follow-up to Caligula's Per-versions. It is a fun sleaze feast filled with all manner of sex, nudity and violence - classic exploitation fare. The plot is fairly self-evident. Nero's doting mother wants her son to be emperor at all costs so she kills her husband with poisoned mushrooms. Nero is now Emperor but controlled by his dominating mother. Soon however the normalities of power become banal and he takes to all manner of sexual excess, sadistic violence and lots of yelling, screaming and raving.

Caligula's Slaves (1985) directed by Lorenzo Onorati is really a very, very low budget rip-off of the various Caligula exploitation films. While there is nudity and some sex, the action is limited and the sets and acting woeful. The plot centres on Caligula attending a nude slave wrestling match. He is attracted to one of them and ignores warnings that she has been sent to murder him. Of course Lysia begins to have second thoughts about her task and the tale unfolds.

TV Shows

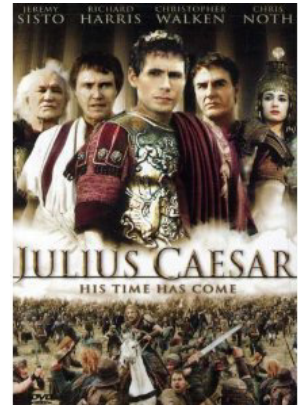
Many television series have been made on Ancient Rome. The most celebrated of its period was *I Claudius* (1976). Made by the BBC it was a comprehensive series of some 650 minutes presented in 13 parts. The series purports to give an insider's view of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty as seen told through the eyes of Claudius. While this Dynasty covered from Emperor Augustus to the death of Nero in 68 C.E the series covers the period from about 20 BC to 54 AD - the death of emperor Claudius. *I Claudius* was



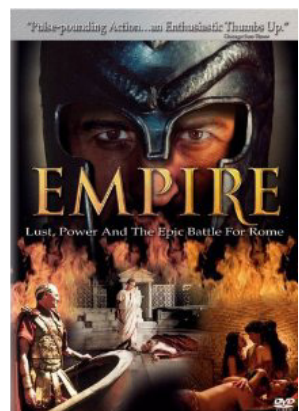
Derek Jacobi in *I Claudius*

based on the historical novels *I Claudius* and *Claudius the God* by Robert Graves with screenwriter Jack Pulman spinning the story into a riveting tale. The acting throughout the series is superb with Derek Jacobi making his name as Claudius. Many people still consider this the very best historical series ever made for television.

Julius Caesar (2002) was a US television series directed by Uli Edel, 240 minutes in length it was broadcast in four episodes. This is quite an extensive look at Emperor Julius Caesar. It covers in quite some detail his campaigns in Gaul and Egypt, his rivalry with General Pompey, and his eventual assassination at the hands of Brutus on March 15, 44. B.C. starting an era of civil wars.



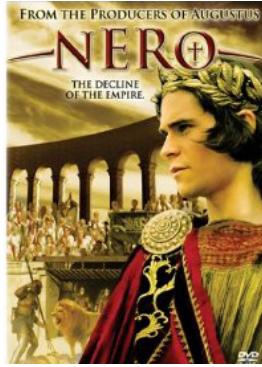
Empire (2005) was a US Television series made in Italy. It was shown in six parts of sixty minutes each. The story is set in Rome around 44 B.C., just after the assassination of Julius Caesar. A young Octavius, named heir by Caesar is challenged by Marc Anthony resulting in a civil war. The story is told as seen through the eyes of the fictional gladiator come sword and sandal hero figure Tyrannus.



Augustus (2005) directed by Peter Young is a mix of history and soap opera. It stars Peter O'Toole as Octavius Augustus, heir to Julius Caesar's command of the far-flung Roman empire. Surviving an assassination attempt and realizing his old friend, Agrippa is dead he reflects on his early life.

While O'Toole and Rampling are impressive many of the actors are clearly of non-English speaking background and the dubbing is questionable.

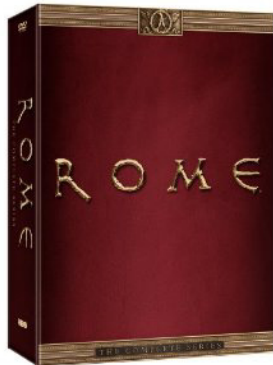
Nero (2005) directed by Paul Marcus. The series explores Nero's descent into madness, starting with his life as a brilliant young prince enduring injustice. Beginning his reign, enforcing reforms and slowly transforming from a popular leader to a tyrant. The film extensively covers his teen years and love life.



HBO's Rome is incredibly realistic



Rome (2005) was an impressive series made for HBO in the US, costing some \$100 million dollars it is one of the very best series ever made on ancient Rome.

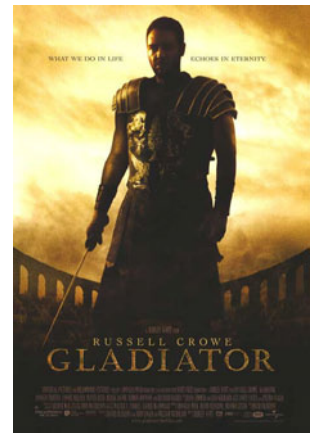


Sadly only two series were made but they were very well received though with some controversy over the historically accurate depiction of Roman sexuality and violence. The plot focused on the transitionary period from republic to autocratic empire. It explored this explosive period through the eyes of people from different strata of society including Julius Caesar, his family, his adopted successor Octavian Augustus and ordinary Romans, such as Lucius Vorenus and Titus Pullo and their families. Ten years in the planning and production, the sets are lavish and authentic, the music atmospheric and the acting excellent.

For a TV series this is a truly epic entertainment. The Blu Ray release includes some excellent historical extras. For anyone interested in ancient Rome this is a must see series.

Modern Epics

Gladiator (2000) directed by Ridley Scott. Victorious general Maximus Decimus Meridias has been named keeper of Rome and its empire by dying emperor Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius wanted to assure that power would pass back from the Caesars to the Senate. However, Aurelius' power-hungry and somewhat twisted son, Commodus, has other ideas. He murders Marcus Aurelius, and plans to execute Maximus in order to secure his claim to the throne. Maximus escapes execution but when he returns home too late and finds his wife and son slaughtered. He is taken into slavery with Commodus thinking he is out of the way.



Maximus is trained as a gladiator by Proximo and spends his nights contemplating avenging



Russell Crowe in Gladiator



Commodus declares thumbs down !

the death of his wife and son and fulfilling the dying wishes of Aurelius. When he is taken to participate in games in Rome he faces-off against Commodus who cannot easily kill him since he has become the favourite of the masses. He soon becomes involved in a plot to remove the emperor from power but there are many hurdles that must be overcome along the way.

The Last Legion (2007) directed by Doug Lefler is set in Rome 476 C.E. The story follows the events surrounding the historical capture of Romulus Augustus and his imprisonment on the island of Capri.



On the eve of the ceremony to crown twelve-year-old Romulus Augustus as the new emperor, the Barbarian general Odoacer arrives in Rome to make a deal with Orestes. Orestes is the father of the young Caesar and when Odoacer makes unrealistic demands in exchange for his support of the Roman legions in the east, Orestes refuses.

On the day of the coronation Odoacer and his army return to Rome to conquer the city. The army of the Goths storm the city and a bloody battle ensues. With Orestes and his wife Julia slaughtered, Romulus is captured along with Ambrosinus and they are taken to the island fortress of Capri originally built by the emperor Tiberius.

It is there that Romulus finds the mythical sword of Caesar that holds the prophecy '*One edge to*

defend, one to defeat; In Britannia was I forged...to fit the hand of he...who is destined to rule'.

As luck would have it not all of the Roman legionnaires are dead. Aurelius is alive and when he learns that the Byzantine Empire will give Romulus sanctuary, he embarks on a quest to save Romulus accompanied by a small group of warriors and Mira, a mysterious Byzantine fighter.

Thanks to the cunning of Ambrosinus and the fighting skill of Aurelius and Mira, Romulus is freed. But when the group arrive on shore, they learn that the Byzantines have joined forces with the Goths. Faced with such betrayal, the only course of action is to reach the one legion still loyal to Rome—the ninth legion in Britannia.

Spartacus, Blood and Sand (projected release date during 2010)

The new series supposedly focuses on a retelling of Spartacus, and stars Andy Whitfield as the rebellious slave. Lucy Lawless, of Xena Warrior Princess fame, plays Lucretia. Since the series Rome proved what could be done in regards to honestly showing the customs of Rome on screen, advertising has guaranteed graphic sex and violence as well as a good plot and solid acting.



"When he's separated from the love of his life, Spartacus is forced into the gruesome and bloodthirsty arena, where a grisly death is primetime entertainment. Spartacus must fight for survival, befriend his enemies and play politics in this new world of corruption, violence, sex and fame.

He'll be seduced by power and tormented by vengeance. But his passion will give him the strength to prevail over every obstacle, in this modern and uninhibited tale of death, honor and endurance."

ALTERNATE HISTORIES IN FILM

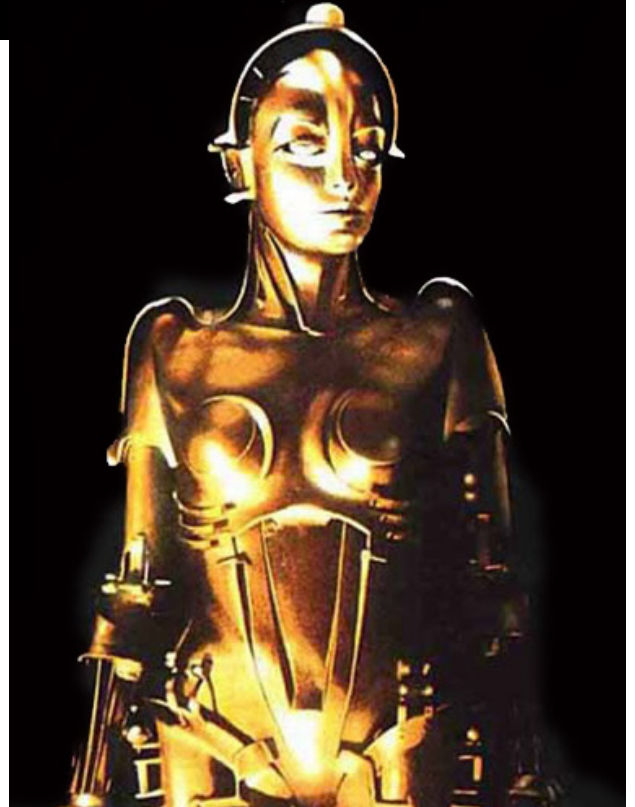
History is a strange and wonderful thing, always unfolding and changing, new details constantly coming to light and continuously being influenced by the perspectives of those who write it. Winston Churchill said "*History is written by the victors*" and thus it is always difficult to draw the line between personal perspective, polemic, propaganda and history.

As science provides new tools of research and new discoveries are made, especially with the advent of digital communications, the future of history never looked so good. When it comes to envisioning how history will unfold film has always welcomed the challenge and provided some of the more challenging views of the future.

From *Metropolis* (1927) to the latest science fiction releases, it is intriguing to see how filmmakers have taken events current at the time, and projecting them into the future, created a vision of where they saw the civilization heading. It does seem most of these visions are negative, but some films such as *Things to Come* (1933) have a more positive, if mixed, message. We have chosen a small selection of films which explore alternate views of history and consider issues which were so significant at the time of production that they were "writ large" and used to create a future world.

The first and probably best known example of an alternate history in film is *Metropolis* (1927). The film is set in the year 2026 in a corporate city-state known as Metropolis. The film is focused on the effects of technology while also covering workers, class warfare and women's rights. The dichotomy between the workers living and working in the city below and the thinkers living in the city in the sky is expressed throughout the film in plot and imagery.

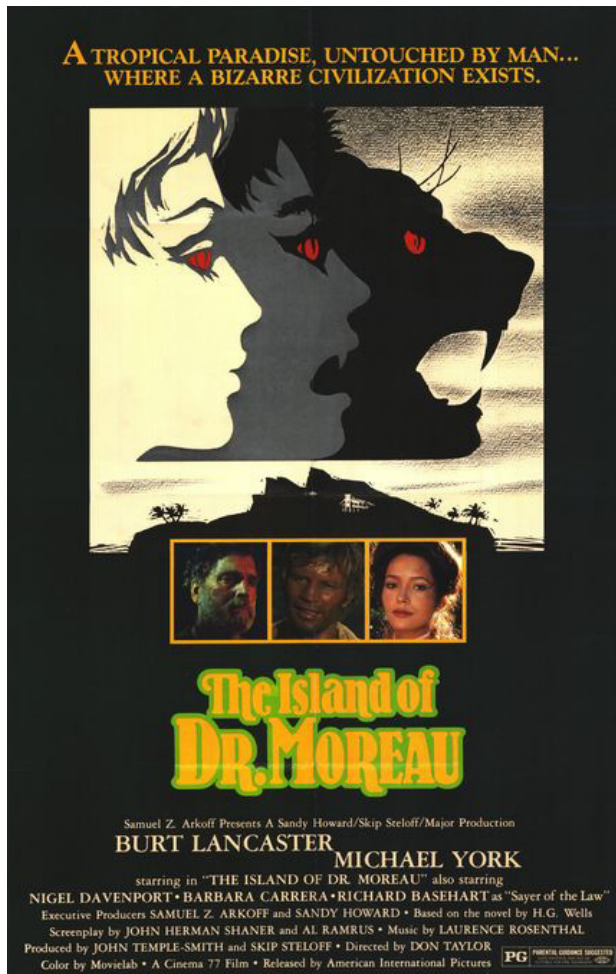
The film projects the technology of the period into the future, and while The Heart Machine is run by electricity, the technology behind the M-Machine is never revealed. There is also an exploration of robotics and sentient machines and



the conflict of emotion and mechanization. There is a strange device which allows Joh Fredersen to contact his supervisors in the factories which anticipates television and there are electronic consoles and automatic doors. Transportation includes airships and monorails as well as future projections regarding cars and aeroplanes.

The Island of Dr. Moreau (1933/1996) was originally made in 1933 as *The Island of Lost Souls* and remade in 1977 and 1996. It was based on the 1896 science fiction novel by H.G. Wells. The novel projects fears current at the time about the state of mankind in view of the discoveries made by Charles Darwin in his *On the Origin of Species*. It was felt that due to a lack of proper breeding mankind was degenerating and theories of eugenics abounded.

At the same time there was a strong scientific and social debate about vivisection. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* projected these fears into an unknown time where science has advanced enough that creating a new species could be

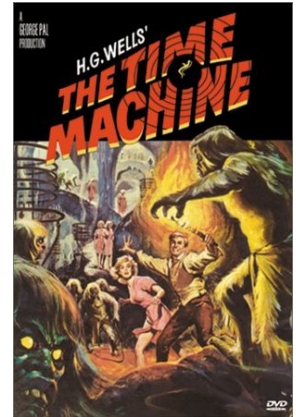


achieved by breeding humans with animals in illegal medical experiments. This theme was central to both the 1933 and 1977 versions of the film while the 1996 edition adds in elements of genetic manipulation. It is set in the year 2010, a time when Moreau has been able to place human DNA into animals to make animals more like human by repressing their animal instincts. The problem is that many of the experiments have failed and even the successful ones require daily doses of a drug to keep their animal instincts from resurfacing.

Things to Come (1933) is a British science fiction film directed by William Cameron Menzies. The screenplay was written by H. G. Wells and is a loose adaptation of his 1933 novel *The Shape of Things to Come* and his 1931 non-fiction work, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*. *Things to Come* sets out a future history from 1936 to 2036 and is set in the fictional city of called Everytown. The film offers an intriguing view of the future including long wars, periods of plague, human conflict and the development of human technology which finally leads mankind towards peace and a journey to the

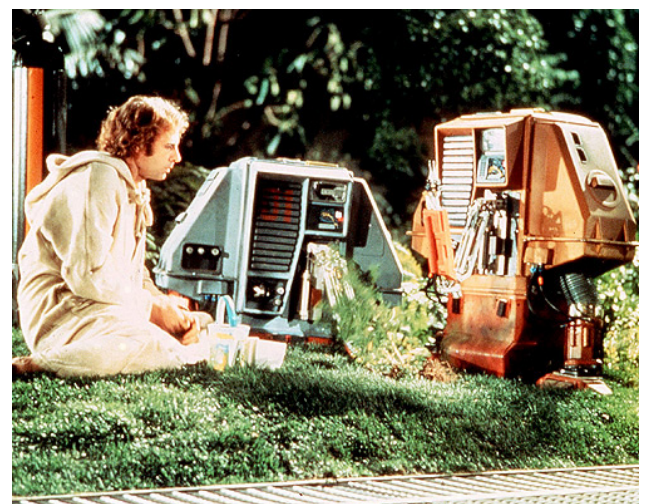
stars. This final achievement leads to conflict between the technophiles and the Luddites who want to return to a simpler life. This is certainly a very interesting view of the future, especially considering when it was made.

The Time Machine (1960/2002) The 1960 film was directed by George Pal and offered one of the most celebrated visions of the future of the period. While the story is based in the year 1900, it features future events such as the horrors of war and a nuclear war in 1966. Finally landing in 802,701 C.E. It is seemingly idyllic filled with a simple tribe known as the Eloi who have no interest in education, technology or history and speak in a simple form of English. However, they are not alone.



The Morlocks are a technologically advanced race who are cannibals and live under the surface using the Eloi as slaves and as food. There are all sorts of intriguing projections about the future especially since the film is artificially set in the year 1900. The scene where the mannequin in the shop window changes clothes showing fashion transitioning through the years is especially memorable.

Silent Running (1972) is environmentally focused science fiction film, directed by Douglas Trumbull, who earlier worked as a special ef-



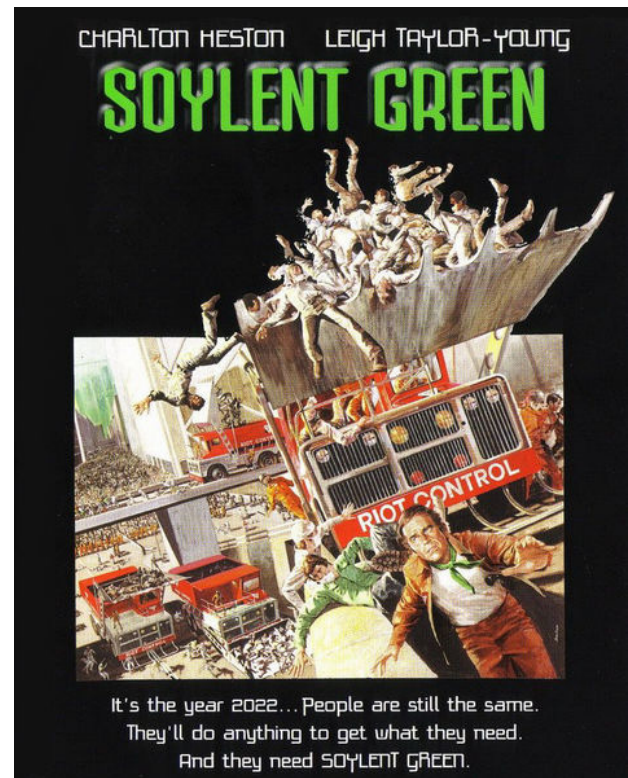
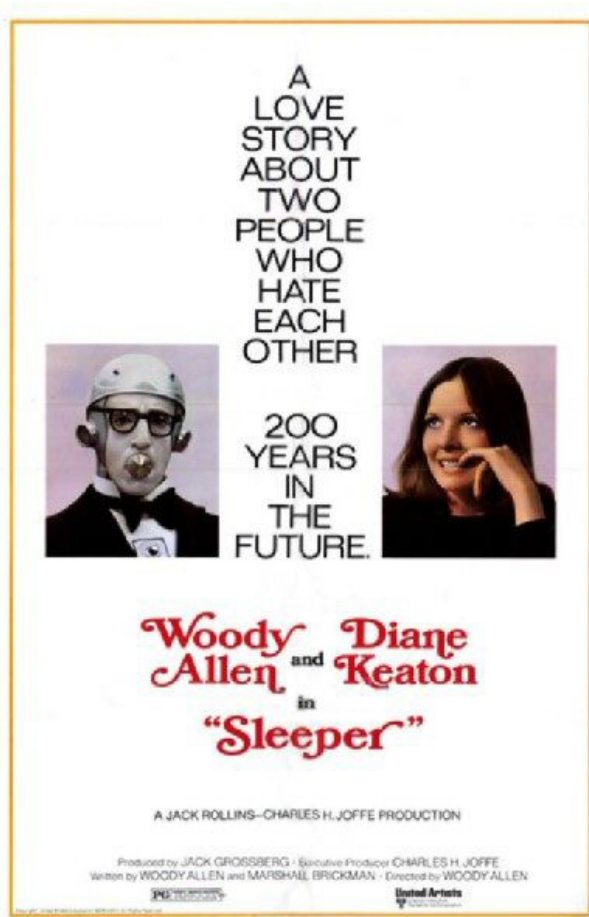
Scene from *Silent Running*

fects supervisor on *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Andromeda Strain*.

The film took 1970s fears about ecology and the environment and projected them into the future. It depicts a future when all plant life on earth is extinct and the remaining specimens have been sent into space on "arks". These huge greenhouses are geodesic domes attached to large craft. One of the central characters, Freeman Lowell, is a devoted environmentalist and biologist (the first greenie on screen ?) and when he is told to destroy the domes and return to earth you know a clash will occur.

Silent Running is quite an amazing vision of the future and is now more significant than ever. Its discussion of the way man is depleting the resources of earth and destroying ecosystems and its depiction of the development of environmental awareness is quite prescient.

Sleeper (1973) is a view of the future which is based on *The Sleeper Awakes* by H.G. Wells and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, both have been filtered through the quirky lens



of Woody Allen. It is a strange and bizarre comedy set in 22nd century America. It focuses on the escapades of Miles Monroe, a jazz musician who was cryonically suspended in 1973 and is woken up 200 years later in the hope that he can be used as a spy to infiltrate a government secret project since he is the only person who is without a biometric identity.

The film explores themes such as the movement towards stronger government (America in the 22nd Century is a military dictatorship), cloning, science and the sexual and social mores of the future.

Soylent Green (1973). In the 1970's there was much debate about the population explosion and films abounded in this field including *ZPG* (Zero Population Growth) 1972, *Soylent Green* (1973) and *Logan's Run* (1976). We will discuss the last two in this article.

Soylent Green (1973) was directed by Richard Fleischer and based on the 1966 science fiction novel *Make Room! Make Room!*, by Harry Harrison. It depicted a future where the world is suffering from overpopulation, depleted resources, extreme pollution, agricultural failure, climate change caused by the greenhouse effect and grinding poverty.



The world's population is unable to fend for itself and hence lives on food rations in the form of "soylent green". The projections of the film about the future are extremely interesting and discussions of climate and the greenhouse effect way before their time.

The debates about population are certainly pertinent though I hardly think we are ready to turn people into food rations, as least not yet!

Logan's Run (1976) is set in the 23rd century. Mankind has survived a nuclear holocaust but overpopulation has taken its toll. The lifespan of every human being has been reduced to 30 years. On that day they celebrate "Lastday" then they participate in a strange religious rite called Carousel where they are guaranteed reincarnation. In reality, they are executed. Living in a hermetically sealed world has its benefits including open sex and recreational drug use but these are used as a form of social conditioning to facilitate the success of Carousel. Those who refuse to end their lives at thirty go on the run but are hunted down and killed by "Sandmen".

Sometime in the 23rd century...the survivors of war, overpopulation and pollution are living in a great domed city, sealed away from the forgotten world outside. Here, in an ecologically balanced world, mankind lives only for pleasure, freed by the servo-mechanisms which provide everything. There's just one catch: Life must end at thirty unless reborn in the fiery ritual of Carousel.

Logan's Run is a fascinating projection of the fears of the time in which it was made. It in-

cludes explorations of extreme hedonism in the form of sex and recreational use of drugs, overpopulation, religious superstition (still, alas, with us today) and dwindling natural resources. Of course the overriding fear is nuclear war and what it would do to the world as we know it.

Rollerball (1975/2002) takes a different tack; it was based on *Roller Ball Murder*, a short story, which first appeared in *Esquire* magazine (1973). It projects the fear of rising crime and of the power of big business into a future world. It is 2018 and the new leads of the world are corporations. Big business is the name of the game and they have stopped all war and crime by uniting the world through one big game, Rollerball. Rollerball is an ultra-violent sport where anything goes and the losers do not get a chance to retire. It was remade in 2002 but there is little to recommend the remake.

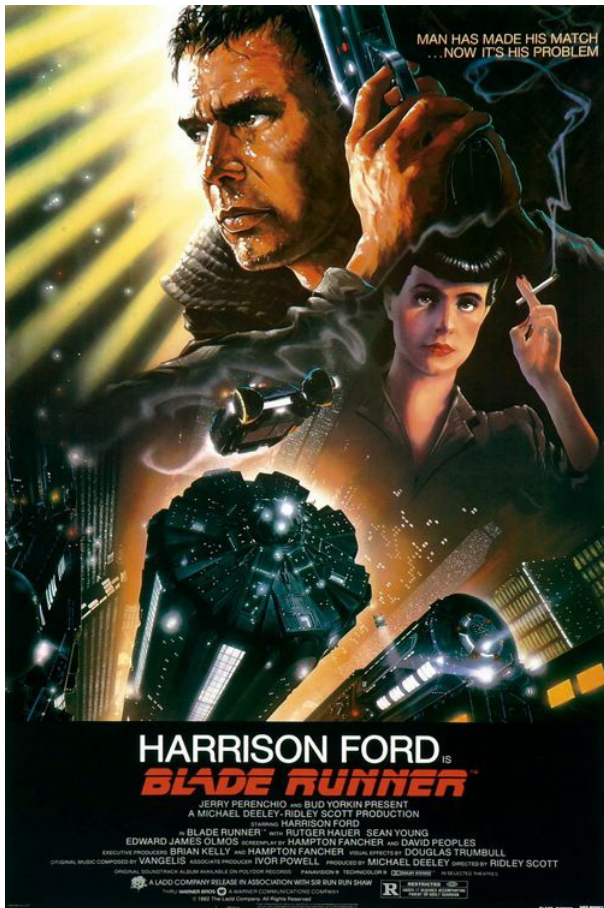
Survivors (1975/2008) is an example of a class of post-apocalyptic film which while it does not quite offer an alternate view of the future (since it is set in the present) does have strong genre similarities. *Survivors*, for example, while set in a present time, explores an alternate future created by the annihilation of the vast majority of the world's population by an unknown virus. A small group survive and relearn the old skills of farming and tool-making and create the basis of a new world. *Survivors* takes the fear of germ warfare and creates an alternate future even though it is based in the present. The 2008 remake varied the theme by having the world decimated by European Flu.



Clonus aka The Clonus Horror (1979) is a film set in an unknown period, present or future. It combines the 1970's obsession with genetic engineering and cloning with a conspiratorial view of government and corporations to tell a tale of science gone wrong. Themes include cloning, genetic engineering, forced psychiatric treatment (including lobotomies), big business and government conspiracies.



Mad Max (1979) is one of the more fascinating



alternate views of the future. It projects a fear of diminishing resources, especially oil, and of spiralling crime and violence, especially biker gangs, into the future to create quite a unique tale. The film is set in an undated future... "A Few Years from Now..." and, unusually, in Australia.

Society is beginning to unravel as the "Oil Age" is ending and motorcycle gangs are roaming the streets fighting over petrol. While the tale focuses on a story of personal tragedy and revenge, the background is a projection of the problems of the late Seventies: ecology, the oil crisis, crime and a lack of law and order.

Blade Runner (1982) directed by Ridley Scott and based on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick is considered one of the most visually textured views of a future world. Every viewing seems to throw up new details of how the future may look with advertising everywhere, cars flying above the streets, the rich living on other planets and the poor and disabled living in squalor on earth among pimps, prostitutes, criminals and cheap stores. Corporations control the economy of the day producing replicants to do the work of humans. But



Scene from THX 1138

there is a hitch. Los Angeles 2019 has a problem. These replicants have developed some degree of self-awareness and want to understand the meaning of their existence.

This is a film which reflects on so many themes significant in the Eighties (and indeed now), technology, social issues, the economy and corporations, crime and disability, law and order and on a larger scale, the nature of consciousness and where meaning come from.

Café Flesh (1982) was one of the very first adult cross-over films. It bridged the market from explicit sex entertainment to mainstream science fiction. It was released in both a mass market R Rated edition and a XXX explicit sex edition. It is set at time when a nuclear apocalypse has killed a large percentage of the population and the vast majority of those left are sex negatives. Sex negatives are unable to have sex and become violently ill if they attempt to do so. The only outlet for their thwarted sexual desires is to visit Café Flesh where sex positives are forced to have sex to entertain the frustrated minority. As the sex positive performer Johnny Rico struts his stuff one sex negative woman is beginning to have doubts about her sex negative status. This is a strange and unusual adult film with strong science fiction credentials and one which projects into the future fears about nuclear war and the effect of radiations on sexuality. Other films of a similar vein, though not XXX rated, included *THX 1138* (1971) and *The Handmaids Tale* (1980).

In *THX 1138* (1971) by George Lucas explores a world where sex and love have been outlawed. The human race has been relocated to an underground city where the population is entertained by holographic TV which uses images of sex and violence to exert control. Sex,

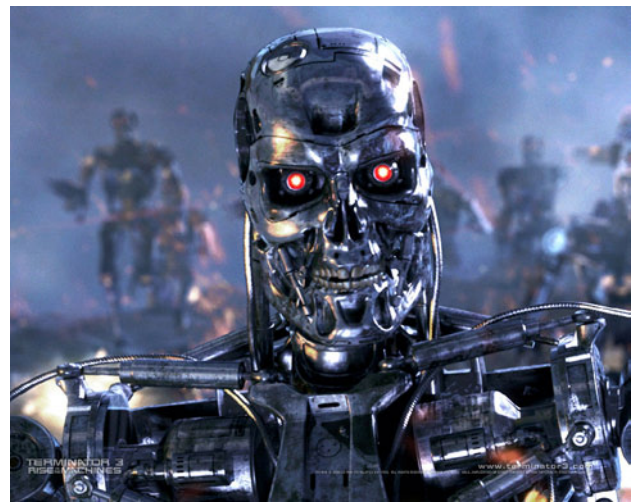


Scene from *The Handmaids Tale*

love and emotions are outlawed and controlled by the constant administration of drugs; non-compliance is punished by robotic guards. This is certainly a very dark vision of the future offering a vision of mind control, fascist governments, robots and the misuse of medicine and technology.

The Handmaids Tale (1980) is a film which is disquieting especially considering the rise of the religious right. Following a coup America is now ruled by a Christian fascist regime. Due to pollution and ecological disasters only a small percentage of woman can have children and they are required to do so. If they refuse or try to escape the regime, they are put in breeding institutions to be conditioned to become good Christian mothers. This is a frightening vision of the future which combines fears regarding the rise of religious conservatism, the way in which women are conditioned to become mothers and nothing more and the dangers of pollution and our lack of respect for the planet.

Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984) is considered the quintessential vision of the future. Written by George Orwell, the film was directed by Michael



Radford. After a nuclear war destroys the world and its governments, a new division of power arises. The world is now divided into three states with Oceania being the most significant, its capital is in London. Oceania is ruled by a totalitarian government which keeps the population in tow by controlling the news, indeed it has a whole department which rewrites history when changes take place which may reflect badly on the hierarchy of Oceania. The government creates a sense of constant dread by claiming there is a constant war against Eastasia. The large telescreens which transmit the news also monitor people's lives and report any infringement of the many rules and regulations of Oceania. The worst crime is thoughtcrime, which includes any form of sex. It is punished by brutal torture and brainwashing.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a complex film which includes all manner of themes. While originally written in 1956 as a critique of all forms of totalitarian government (left and right) it explores such significant concepts as sexual suppression, exploitation of workers, media manipulation, the dangers of bureaucracy, the tendency of governments toward centralized control and the rewriting of history.

Terminator (1984) directed by James Cameron was a highly successful science fiction film set in a dystopian future. Taking fears of technology it projected a future where intelligent machines had battled against mankind and won and the human race was left fighting a guerrilla war to survive. It is 2029 and an intelligent machine known as The Terminator is sent back in time to 1984 to kill Sarah Connor, the mother of a resistance fighter who is leading the guerrilla war. At the same time the resistance sends



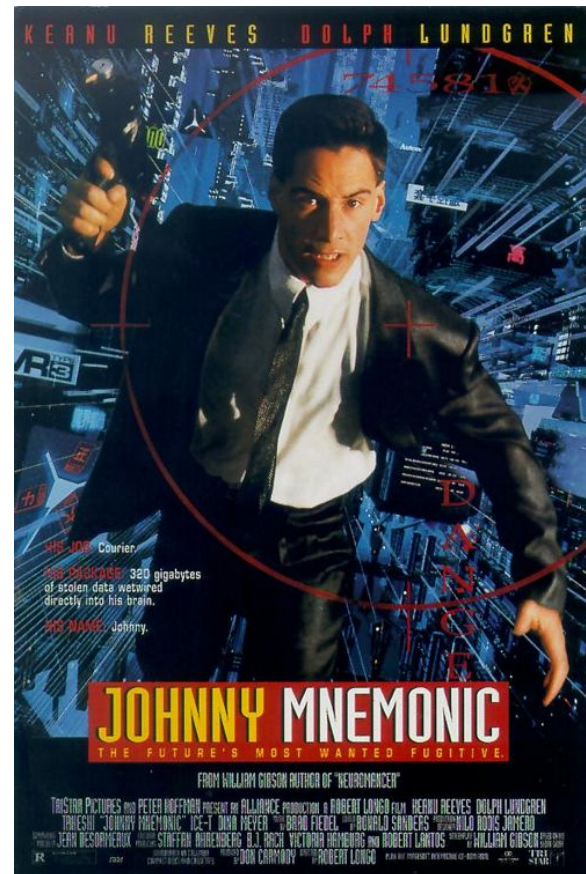
Scene from *Brazil*

back Kyle Reese to protect her and a battle which would have consequences for the whole human race unfolds.

The vision offered of the future is intriguing. A computer network with a high degree of artificial intelligence known as Skynet becomes self-aware and initiates a nuclear war against humanity so a new race of machines can rule the planet. It embodies both the hopes and fears of the 1980's about technology and includes ideas found throughout the literature and films of the Cyberpunk movement.

Brazil (1985) directed by Terry Gilliam is one of the most eccentric of the all the films looking at the future. It is a cynical and satirical comedy which seems to combine every possible dystopian vision of the future. The world is run by a bureaucratic and totalitarian government much like that of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but its bureaucracy has degenerated to such an extent that it is mindlessly incompetent. Its infrastructure is constantly falling to pieces and its industry is marked by inefficiency.

The story is focused on Sam, a low level government employee who is given the task of correcting a major problem that was caused when a fly landed on a printer and an innocent man, Archibald Buttle is arrested rather than the terrorist, Archibald "Harry" Tuttle. Satire abounds with commentaries on plastic surgery, government incompetence, religion, terrorism and pretty well every major theme in dystopian cinema. It takes so many of the current problems of society, it is just as current today as when it was made, and not only projects them into the future but takes them to such an extreme that they become a biting satire on the present.



Robocop (1987) directed by Paul Verhoeven is set in the near future and focuses on crime and violence in Detroit. It projects the violence of U.S. society into the future and considers various options including the use of robots and a human cyborg to control crime. The story spawned various sequels and was used to explore themes of crime and justice, the power of the corporation, government corruption and what it truly means to be human.

Jurassic Park (1993) directed by Steven Spielberg doesn't fit quite within our focus as it is set in the present though with a focus on a fictional island. Its projection of features regarding science, genetic manipulation and big business, however, are familiar ones.

Johnny Mnemonic (1995) directed by Robert Longo is based on the short story by William Gibson (1985). It is set in the year 2021 when technology is the name of the game. A large percentage of humanity is suffering from NAS (nerve attenuation syndrome) which is caused by technology overload.

Johnny Mnemonic is a data courier. His head and its implant are his livelihood. His head can

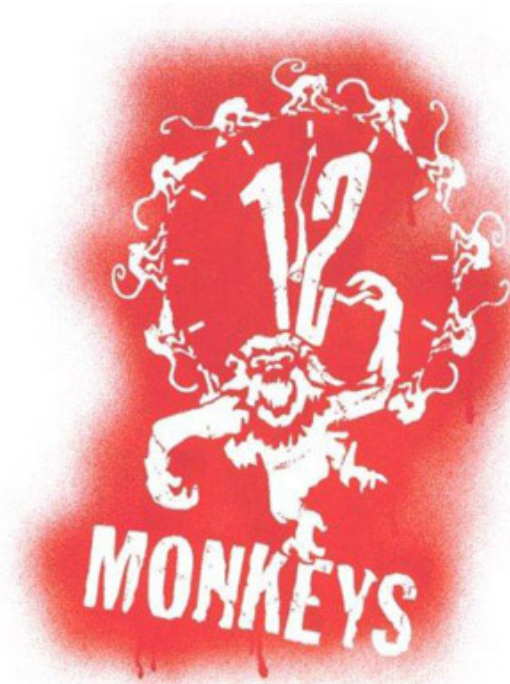
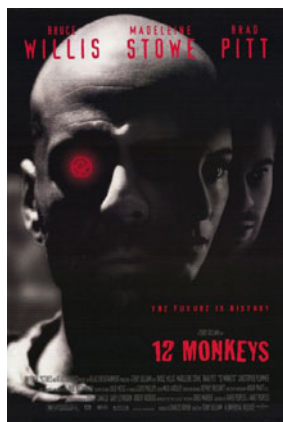


Scenes from Gattaca

carry up to 160 GB of data, but his present load is over 300. He carries with him the cure for NAS but the worry is that if the data is not downloaded within three days the data will corrupt and Johnny's head will explode. If that is not bad enough, Pharmakom is hot on his tail. It wants the data at all costs, even if it means cutting his head off ! A cyberpunk fantasy *Johnny Mnemonic* embodied the fears and hopes of technophiles everywhere. It has some interesting ideas, such as NAS, but is now pretty dated.

12 Monkeys (1995) directed by Terry Gilliam was inspired by the French short film *La Jetée* (1962). While many of Gilliam's films have been hit and miss, *12 Monkeys* was very well received. In a grim future, the surviving population of the world lives underground after a deadly virus decimated the planet between 1996 and 1997. The film involves Cole, a convicted prisoner, taking the dangerous journey back into the past to collection information on an ecological terrorist group known as The Army of the Twelve Monkeys and to collection a sample of the virus in the hope that some sort of cure can be made. After arriving in the wrong time, he must escape from a mental institution, and finding the Twelve Monkeys are an innocent if not eccentric environmental action group, locate the real terrorist before it is too late.

12 Monkeys takes a range of concerns from the Nineties (and now) and explores them in both a future and present world.



These include environmentalism, germ warfare, genetic manipulation of germs and viruses, pollution, crime and law and order.

Gattaca (1997) directed by Andrew Niccol is a powerful exploration of genetics, eugenics and a society obsessed with perfection. The title is based on the initial letters of the four DNA nitrogenous bases - adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine. The world of the future is one ruled by science, eugenics has been embraced and expectant mothers are processed at the earliest stage so genetic changes can be made in the embryo to enhance its qualities. These enhanced children are the backbone of the society and their details are held in a genetic registry, they are known as valids.

In-valids are those who parents refuse to use the new science and are born without genetic



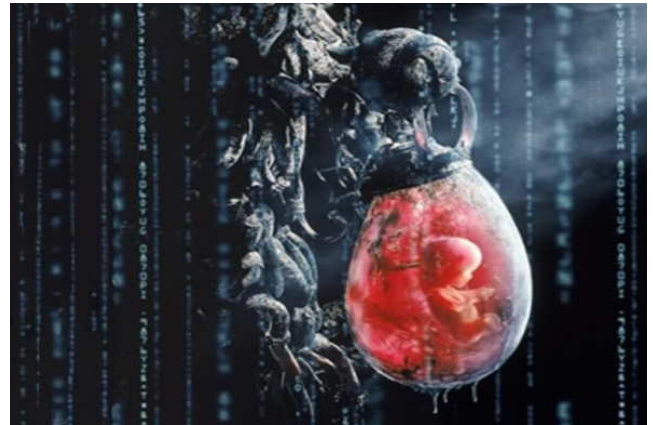
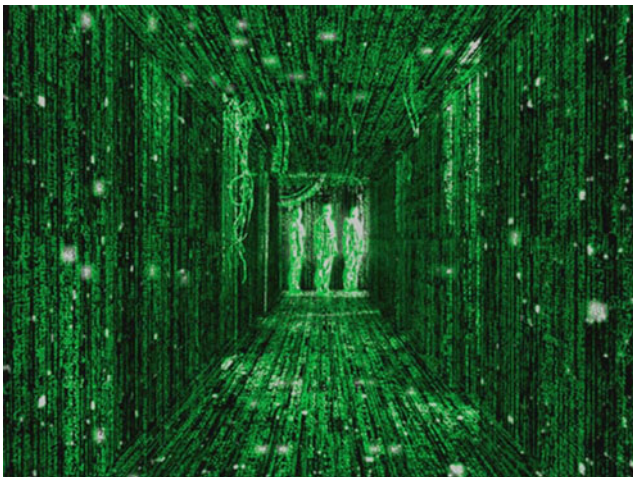


enhancement. While discrimination is illegal, most firms profile those applying for jobs and hence in-valids are left on the unemployment queue or doing backbreaking menial labour.

The film is a superb exploration of issues relating to the ramifications of the discovery of the human genome and its effect on our society in the future.

The Matrix consists of a trilogy of films written and directed by the Wachowski brothers. The first film *The Matrix* was released in March 1999; two sequels, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*, were released in 2003. *The Matrix* depicts a future in which the world has been destroyed by a war between humans and machines. Mankind believe that if they terminated all sources of power the machines would not be able to operate. Instead the sentient machines took control of the planet and created an artificial form of reality known as The Matrix.

Humans are born, live and die in pods with their bodily energy used to power the machines. Humans are connected directly into the virtual



world and hence do not realize the true nature of their condition.

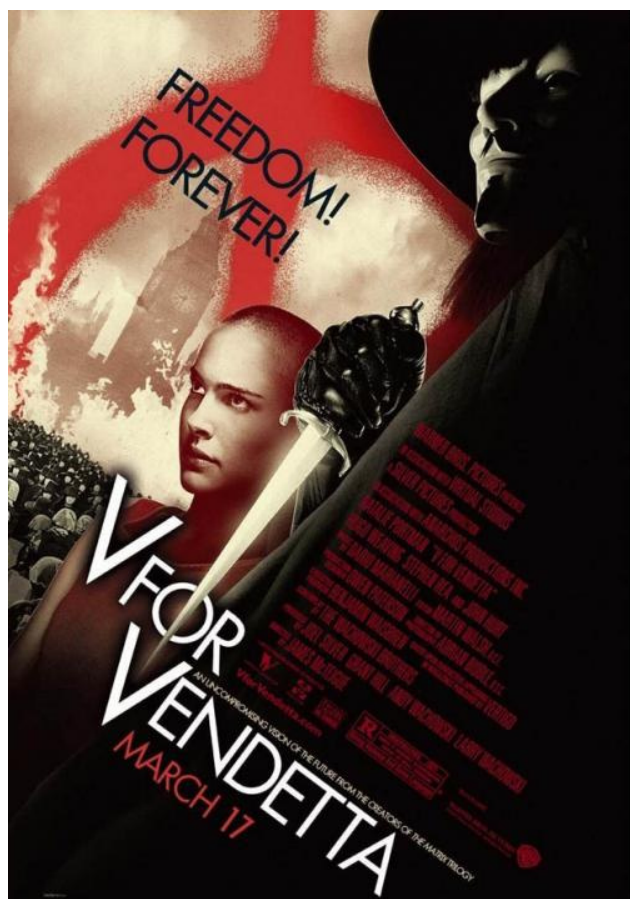
The Matrix covers a myriad of themes including issues relating to the risks of technology, the nature of freedom and reality. It has much in common with *Dark City* (1998) by Alex Proyas. Both films while set in a strange futuristic world and exploring many themes similar to those of the other films in this article, have a strong mythological and religious focus and are more philosophical in orientation.

Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow (2004) written and directed by Kerry Conran is unusual as it is set in an alternate 1939. The film involves all manner of retro technology including giant robots, sky ships, Zeppelins and rockets. While essentially an action machine it is an unusual amalgam of the past and the present creating a truly retropunk view of the world.

V for Vendetta (2005) directed by James McTeigue and produced by Joel Silver and the Wachowski brothers, who also wrote the



Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow

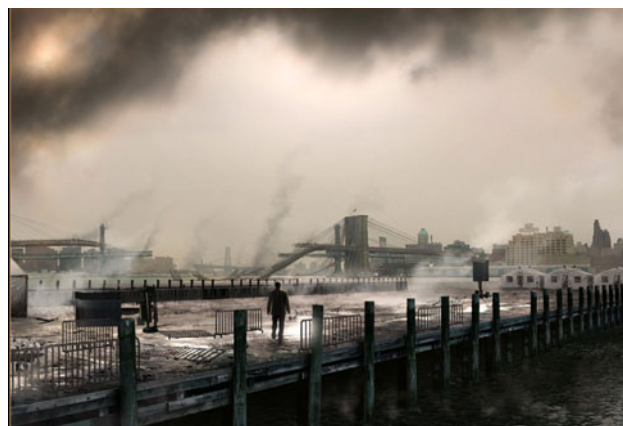


screenplay. The film is an adaptation of the graphic novel of the same name by Alan Moore and David Lloyd. It offers a dark and ominous view of the future with similarities to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It is set in a future Britain which is ruled by Norsefire, a Christian fascist regime. The plot of the film explores a world where the media is controlled and any sexual or ideological variation severely punished. Its portrayal of Christian homophobia is powerful as is depiction of violent state police and the manipulation of news.

The central character V fights against the regime but at great cost to himself and those around him. *V for Vendetta* certainly updates Orwell's vision of the future and projects many of society's current concerns about the rise of the conservative right and the tenacity of prejudice even against all moves towards a more tolerant society.

I am Legend (2008) directed by Francis Lawrence takes its inspiration from Richard Matheson's novel of the same name. Other adaptations of the tale include *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) and *The Omega Man* (1971).

It is set in Manhattan in 2012 where a virus has



Scene from I am Legend

killed a large percentage of the population and turned the rest into violent zombies known as "Darkseekers". The virus developed out of an attempt to create a cure for cancer and the story centres on one lone individual working to reverse the damage the virus has caused. In many ways *I am Legend* and other films of similar ilk are projections into the future of current fears about medical research and genetic manipulation.

10,000 BC (2008) directed by Roland Emmerich is an example of the worst kind of historical revisionism in film. Rather than projecting an alternate past it attempts to create a possible real past but one based on the pseudo archaeology of such authors as Robert Schloch, John Anthony and Adrian Gilbert.

Emmerich also created an alternate disaster film based on similar new age theories in *2012* (2009). Both are memorable for their large budgets, ridiculous plots and ideological vacuity.



Brave New World (2011) is one of the most significant of all the alternate views of the future, comparable to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. While various TV movies have been made it is surprising no full length major feature has hit the big screen. The rumour is that a major adaptation is on the way from Ridley Scott starring Leonardo DiCaprio.

Mary Higgins Clark – “America’s Queen of Suspense”

In the United States the detective drama, like the Western, seems to be heading for extinction. In the made-for-TV shows that are now so successful murder-solving seems to depend on gadgets like overnight DNA testers and databases that list everything on every known criminal. Crimes are often solved by great leaps of intuition. In the real world it is different.

One author who has not abandoned the traditional suspense / thriller genre is Mary Higgins Clark. She started writing short stories and radio scripts in 1956 and moved on from there. Her most effective training was a long-running writers’ workshop at New York University. Students would critique each others’ work. One of the professors urged the aspiring writers to base their stories on “Who?” and “What if?...” and to get their ideas from the daily papers. It was good advice.

She has written over thirty novels of which seventeen have so far been made into feature films or made-for-TV films in the U.S. and Canada. All her suspense books have become bestsellers. She has sold over 80 million copies in the U.S. alone. She is less well known overseas so far but her popularity is still growing.

So why is she so successful? Her novels are not about bosomy heroines sighing after handsome young men in the Barbara Cartland style. She does not need sexy femme fatales to dress up a plot, nor does she write violent scenes. She writes about murder and how her characters react to it, not the actual violence itself. In this respect she has been compared to Alfred Hitchcock. When working on a book she may write an imaginary biography for the lead character and this gives them a personality that is then expressed in the chapters. The plots are complex and she keeps the suspense going right up until the end. She has a knack for making you suspect every character in turn until you finally find out who did do it. This is detective suspense writing at its best.

Her lead characters are strong independent women, not glossy TV starlets but ordinary women who usually have to stand on their own to survive. Her women often hold responsible jobs – policewomen, medical examiners, busi-



ness managers – but there seem to be none of the decorative touches of the TV show women. Her heroines are real women who know what it is to hold down a responsible job, often against male hostility. Perhaps it is this strength of her leading women that makes her work so interesting.

Mary Higgins Clark is now co-writing books with her daughter Carol. Some critics believe that her joint work is perhaps less solid and lighter in tone than her solo books but I don’t think it detracts from the plots in any way. She has received many honours in her lifetime and the title “America’s Queen of Suspense” has been well earned.

Let’s now have a look at a few of the films made from her novels .

Before I Say Goodbye Visual Entertainment R4 DVD

Nell Cauliffe is being coached for her entry into politics by her grandfather. Her architect husband Adam may have been involved in a dodgy company bribes deal but his boat blows up killing him, his secretary and a business partner while arranging a business deal. Is someone trying to remove him from the enquiry into the company’s illegal dealings? Who is the man who was





watching Adam and photographing his movements?

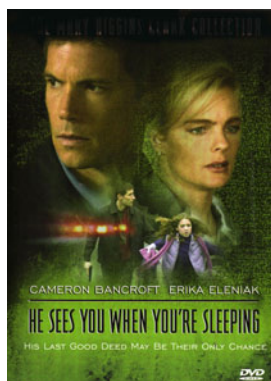
The property developer for the new development was not on the boat when it blew up, as a result of a car accident. He reveals to police that he wouldn't have used Adam's design for the project anyway since he regarded Adam as a fairly ordinary architect, but had to deal with him since Adam had bought a critical piece of property for the development. The old building that was holding up the development was then destroyed in a mysterious fire.

As the plot progresses it seems Adam may have been involved in deeper, nastier matters than his wife knew about. The business partner who was killed in the blast had fifty thousand dollars in cash hidden away. Was it Adam's bribe money? What was Adam's involvement? When a strange woman appears and says she is in psychic contact with Adam, she tells Nell many personal details of their life and says that Adam has told her to “let him go”. Nell's life starts to fall apart as more evidence turns up. She is attacked by an unknown man, her grandfather Mac is shot, and she is having premonitions that she is going to be killed.

Clark's skill at maintaining the suspense right up to the very end is well shown in this film.

He Sees You When You're Sleeping Visual Entertainment R4 DVD

This film was originally made for TV and is an unusual break from Mary Higgins Clark's normal style. It was co-written with her daughter and unusually starts a male



lead, although the female support is the usual strong female role. There are even some humorous moments in the story.

Sterling Brooks has not lived a great life up to the point when he is killed by a stray golfball. Before he can enter Heaven he is assigned to protect a little girl, Marissa. Her father has left her and her mother Annie, who is Sterling's ex-girlfriend, is in the Witness Protection Program waiting to testify against two local gangsters. Protecting them does not fit Sterling's usual self-centred lifestyle but he has until Christmas to reunite the family. Or else.

Marissa is the only one who can see him. She thinks he must be an angel, but she is not impressed with an “angel” who can't even fly. Gradually, though, she comes to believe in him and to trust him.

Sterling finds that he still has feelings for Marissa's mother. Annie is starting to fall apart under the stress of the constant trial delays and the threat of death and she is missing her daughter. Surprisingly though she can now see Sterling – surprisingly because she saw him killed by the golfball and thinks he must be a ghost.

Sterling is finally developing some compassion now he has seen the situation with Marissa and when Annie tells him that he is Marissa's father



the whole situation becomes very personal. Meanwhile the Badgett brothers, the criminals, are trying to kidnap Marissa to put pressure on her mother.

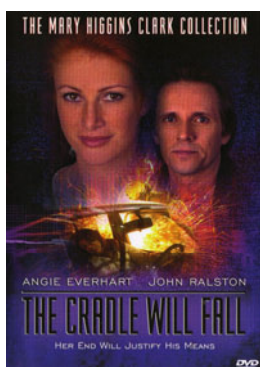
The Cradle Will Fall Visual Entertainment R4 DVD

Mary Higgins Clark is at the peak of her performance with this deadly suspense drama. As usual she develops her characters, both good and bad, to perfection throughout the film but keeps you guessing about the final twists in the plot until the very end.

County Prosecutor Katie de Maio (Angie Everhart) is admitted to the Westlake Clinic for a routine operation. She is investigating the suicide of a pregnant woman but the case is starting to look like murder and there seems to be a connection with the Clinic. As well as abortions the Clinic also does fertility work and is getting some remarkable results.

The Clinic’s gynecologist, Dr Highley, and his psychologist assistant seem to have secrets. Are they related to the suicide / murder? As fast as suspects are found they become dead suspects. The connection with the Clinic becomes stronger but how can such highly regarded doctors be suspect?

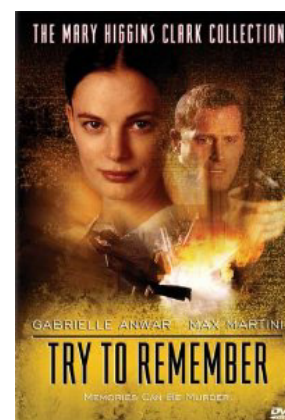
Katie is admitted to the Clinic for her own procedure, but is she a candidate for murder herself? If so, who is the murderer? And why is he or she killing people apparently at random? The answers are horrible and deadly and Katie is caught in the middle of it.



I think this is one of Mary Higgins Clark’s best works. It has been really well dramatised from the book.

Try To Remember Visual Entertainment R4 DVD

Local girl Lisa has come back to town as a detective in the local police force. The old-style police sergeant does not believe in women officers and seems to obstruct her at every turn.



Lisa’s grandmother is murdered. Lisa feels responsible for the earlier childhood murder of her best friend Jenny because she let her go off with a local lad, Jake Miller, who is believed to have killed her. Jake has just been paroled from prison and may be responsible for the latest murders of people who gave evidence against him at his trial. Was Lisa’s grandmother’s murder a way for Jake to get back at her?

Jake visits her late one night and says he is being set up, but by who? She starts to believe him, but next day Jake assaults a coworker with a hammer and goes on the run. Later that night the sergeant is killed in a stakeout of Jake’s place. There is enough evidence in Jake’s place to convict him of the other murders but is he guilty or is he indeed being set up?

A local mechanic, Benny, who was Jenny’s boyfriend, is a possible suspect now based on information from the psychiatrist who treated Jake and Benny. Lisa is surprised to find that Benny holds her responsible as for his girlfriend’s death.

The suspects come and go in the best Mary Higgins Clark style, and the murderer is someone you simply don’t suspect.

Most of Mary Higgins Clark’s films are now available on DVD. There is a particularly good seven-DVD set from Ardustry that covers an excellent range of her work. If you like real detective mysteries, give it a try. In Australia they are available as single titles from Visual Entertainment.

Centurion Cinema Release Magnolia Films

Neil Marshall of *The Descent* and *Dog Soldiers* fame has given us a modern day Sword and Sandal classic. Filled to the brim with blood, guts and glory it nevertheless has an interesting plot, excellent acting and a good sense of humour when the need arises.



Roman centurion Quintus Dias (Michael Fassbender) is at the core of a battle between the Romans and Picts around 117 CE. He is captured and brutalized by the Picts and only just escapes with his life when the Romans save him at the last minute before he is about to be killed.

He is soon sent on a new mission to march north to help wipe the Picts from the face of the Earth and destroy their leader, Gorlaconit. It all goes horribly wrong when their dangerous but beautiful tracker Etain betrays them and leads them all into a trap.

The battle is swift and brutal and only a small group of them survive among the dead, including Quintus, Bothos (David Morrissey); Thax (J.J. Feild); Brick (Liam Cunningham), who was just about to retire; African Macros (Noel Clarke); Greek Leonidas (Dimitri Leonidas); and cook Tarak (Riz Ahmed) who originally hails from the Hindu Kush.

When they realize their general has been captured they follow the Picts in the vain hope of



rescuing him. They secretly enter the camp but cannot free him in time but one of the group make a fatal error; he kills the young son of the Pictish leader. The leader declares a vendetta against them and the hunt begins led by the embodiment of wrath called Etain.

As they try to find their way to the legions of Rome they come across all manner of disasters and setbacks.

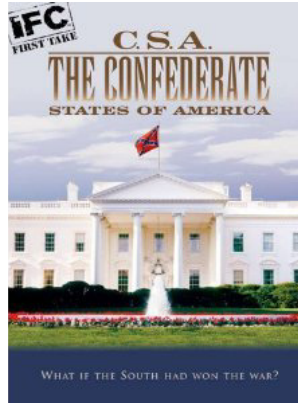
The story includes lots of twists and turns including quite an unexpected ending. The film relies on solid acting, character development and mood rather than CGI and is hence a nice change from Hollywood blockbusters.

The cinematography is beautiful including amazing helicopter shots used to show off the exquisitely austere Scottish landscape.



Confederate States of America
IFC Films
R1 DVD

Presented by Spike Lee, *Confederate States of America* is one of the most breathtaking satires you will ever see. It is mockumentary taken to extreme and amuses, offends and shocks in equal measures.



Kevin Willmott has created a fake documentary with newsbreaks, adverts, commentators and more. This is a different America, one where the South has won the Civil War. The film is represented as having been produced by a British broadcasting company and only being presented for the first time on television in the States.

Beginning with the British and French forces joining the battle with the Confederacy, thus assuring the defeat of the North at Gettysburg and ensuing battles, the South takes the battle northward and forms one country out of the two. Lincoln attempts escape to Canada but is captured in blackface. This moment is captured in the clip of a silent film that might have been.

After victory, President Davis brings slavery back to the northern states by offering a tax rebate to businesses and households who will buy and own them. Liberals move to Canada. The nation chooses an expansionist policy and conquers Cuba, Mexico and South America.

As world war looms, the CSA takes a non-aggressive stance toward the Third Reich and their move toward racial purity (although not condoning their wasting of possible slave stock by the Final Solution) and makes a pre-emptive



nuclear strike on Japan on December 7, 1941. Hitler and the CSA have a good relationship though disagreeing on the commercial value of inferior racial stock.

Kennedy is assassinated soon after being elected as it appears he will not only emancipate but also give women the vote. A growing black terrorist base stems from Canada and a Cold War breaks out...complete with the Cotton Curtain being built between the two countries.

Through it all, including a contemporary run for the presidency, we follow a political dynasty, the Fauntroy family, who lead the country through its triumphs and tragedies.

This is truly a startling work of satire, made all the more confronting in that many of the products advertised in the breaks were actually available on the American market, from Sambo to Coon Inn. While it uses a confronting if not potentially offensive form of politically incorrect humour, it does so in a way that makes us consider the racism that still exists within the modern Western world.

The re-envisioning of history with new wars, characters, historical works, movie clips and documents is ingenious to say the least and CSA is certainly a fascinating and challenging work of satire. One could argue that the satire is too heavy handed and at times the anger and fury overtakes the storytelling and dilutes the effectiveness of the film. That being said, it is such an innovative take on American history that regardless of how it divides the critics, it is well worth watching so you can make up your own mind.

Website: <http://www.csathemovie.com/>

The Fall of The Roman Empire
Umbrella
Entertainment
R4 DVD

If you are going to do a sword and sandal epic, this is how it should be done. A decent budget, some very good actors and spectacular scenery all combine to give a film that is well above the others in the genre. The film dates back to 1964 and owes a lot to the 1959 epic *Ben Hur*, but is good enough to stand by itself as more than just a copy.



Emperor Marcus Aurelius is dying in his castle on the northern frontier with Germania. Rather than pass the emperor's position on to his son Commodus he tells his daughter that he will give it to his other (adopted) son, Livius. He regards Commodus as wasteful of men, a boastful, vain warrior who prefers slaughter to peace. Peace is what Rome needs at the moment as the Persians in the east are causing trouble. Peace in Germania will free up troops to fight in the east. Before he can announce his decision he is poisoned by a slave loyal to Commodus. Livius, believing himself unfit to rule as Emperor, goes along with Commodus' announcement of himself as Emperor.

Livius soon regrets his decision as Commodus turns into a vicious wastrel, increasing taxes on the eastern provinces. This is exactly what will turn the provinces to the Persians and so it happens. Rome is starving but Commodus' lavish

lifestyle will not be reigned in. Livius is recalled from the northern border where he is making peace with the German tribes and put in charge of the eastern armies. He is horrified to find that many of Rome's previous allies have already gone over to the Persians. It is only his military skills that save the provinces for Rome. Commodus wants to punish them savagely by destroying towns and crucifying and enslaving large numbers of the inhabitants. Livius refuses and travels to Rome to put his case for mercy so they will not be fighting a continuous war in the east as they had to in the north.

Commodus is by now completely power crazed and has had himself declared a god. He controls the Senate and Livius is imprisoned for treason and is to be burnt alive. Commodus in one last boastful gesture invites Livius to fight him in single combat, convinced that his godhood will protect him.

The dialogue is rather stilted, as most of these films are, but when delivered by actors of the like of Alec Guinness, Christopher Plummer, Stephen Boyd or James Mason the words carry a conviction that makes the film work. The female lead, Sophia Loren, has little to do but stand around looking sultry (or should that be surly?) but even she is more convincing than the fair haired blue eyed beauties of the cheaper films. The film is not let down by budget effects either. The phrase "cast of thousands" seems to apply here. The set of Rome is quite spectacular and the costuming is magnificent.

This film is now showing its age a little, but it has aged gracefully rather than comically. It is still a good epic.



Giant of Marathon
From The Steve Reeves
Collection
RetroMedia
R0

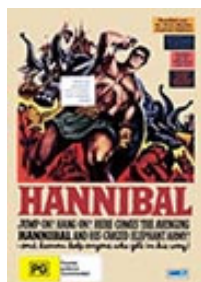


Athens is about to be invaded by the Persian Darius and its forces are outnumbered six to one. Some traitors in Athens see the only way to retain their power will be to surrender the city to Darius. Philippides, leader of the City Guard and a recent Olympics winner, has other ideas. He seeks the help of the Spartans whose trained warriors and well equipped fleet may make the difference. As he points out to them, if Athens falls Sparta will be the next one attacked. There follows epic sea and land battles and the Persians, of course, are thoroughly routed.

By sword and sandal standards this film is pretty good. By 1959 the producers and directors had a good grip on the genre and the blatant cheap look of the earlier films was gone although the brief skirts were retained. Steve Reeves' acting is a bit wooden but all he really has to do is stand there, fight, and flash his nipples at the enemy and the leading lady occasionally. As usual it was made in Italy, but unusually it had a decent budget. The sea battle scenes particularly are impressive and not all the flaky model work seen in many such films. The script suffers from the usual "thee" and "thou" that are apparently meant to show deep religious meaning. Or something.

RetroMedia has done a good job enhancing the masters for DVD. This one also includes War of the Trojans, another Reeves classic, so the DVD is good value. It promises "Approx. 3 hours of muscle crunching thrills". If sword and sandal is your thing this DVD is a good one for your collection.

Hannibal
Warner Bros
Big Sky Video
R4 DVD



This 1959 epic is along the same lines as other really bad Victor Mature epics like Demetrius and the Gladiators, Samson and Delilah, and The Robe. Mature strikes a pose at any opportunity, has doubtful



acting ability (in these films at least) and is really not given any chance to improve his performance given a stilted script and historically inaccurate storyline. Even the cover of the DVD doesn't give you much hope –

Jump on ! Hang on ! Here comes the avenging Hannibal and his crazed elephant army.

Well yes, the elephants probably will be crazed if you wave flaming torches at them. And they are young Indian elephants, not the larger and more impressive African elephants. Still, apart from many errors like this we do get lots of men running around in very short skirts. We get pompous Romans, an even more pompous musical score, vacuous women, great battle scenes in which the Roman soldiers can't hit an elephant with an arrow at twenty paces – what more could you want? Apart from acting ability?

In fairness to Mature he was employed mostly for his beefcake looks and was obliged to show his torso at any opportunity. In unfairness to him, his torso was often a better actor given the sort of film he played in. In Hannibal he was directed by well-known B director Edgar G Ulmer. Ulmer could direct a good film and get good results from his actors but was usually limited by miniscule budgets. With a bigger budget for this film he was able to include some quite impressive battle scenes. Ulmer had to contend with a production that was largely financed by Warner Brothers but filmed in Italy using mostly Italian actors. It must have been a nightmare. Scriptwriter Mortimer Braus should carry some of the blame as he had to write a script where the mouth movements in Italian could be overdubbed into reasonable English, but essentially the bulk of the blame goes to Alessandro Continenza who butchered the original story to produce a "treatment" from which it never recovered.

The film could have been so much more.

The Pagan Queen
Czech Republic
Amok Film
R1 DVD

The film is based on the legend of 8th Century Queen Libuse in the area roughly known as Bohemia. In these days it was a loose collection of villages and small agricultural areas set in the great European forest. Libuse's reign, however, marks the beginning of massive change for her country and her people. Invaders are moving into the area and she must initiate some of these changes herself for her people to survive. With so many men in the army she must buy in food. To raise money for this she allows the noblemen to open mines, which pollute the rivers and in turn lower the agricultural production.

The noblemen feel it is time for her to marry. Assassinating Libuse is not really an option – she is protected by her lifelong friend Vlasta who leads a team of Amazons. The nobles believe the people will more readily follow a man than a woman into battle. Of course, her husband would become king and gain power while she produces an heir. Instead of marrying a noble Libuse decides to marry a long-term lover, a commoner ploughman named Premysl. He is not happy with the arrangement and threatens that he will rule the country with an iron fist. This he does and power gradually passes from Libuse to him. He does, however, consolidate the country and makes it safer from invaders.

Libuse is the daughter of a forest elf and has the ability to see into the future. She has foreseen a



great city being built in her country, but such a city will mean more food will be needed to support it. This in turn will mean the destruction of the great forests. Her husband proceeds ruthlessly to force changes on the country and Libuse is becoming concerned at what she has set in motion. Her people are becoming little more than slaves of the king and the forests from which she draws her power are disappearing. Can she reverse the destruction, or is it too late?

The film is a story of conflict between the old ways and the new and between men and women. It is sad in that it highlights the need for a ruler to surrender their own life and loves for the benefit of their people. It still maintains an element of hope, though, in Libuse's vision of the great new city that became Prague.

Filmed in the remaining ancient forests, the film has a look of authenticity about it that is lacking in too many of the more glamorous films of the same genre.



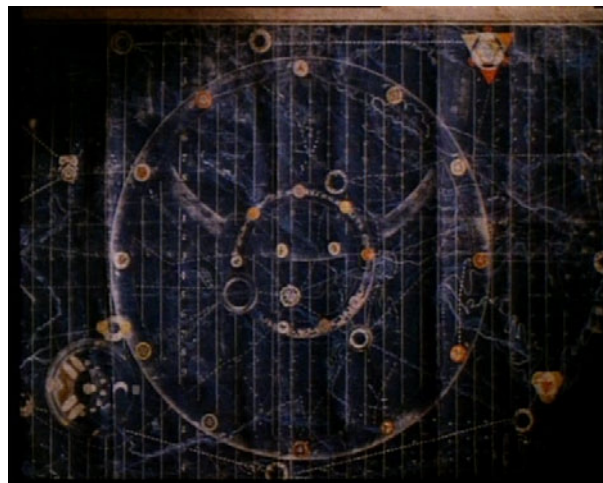
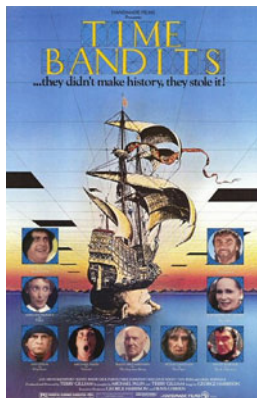
Time Bandits
Handmade Films
2 DVD Special Edition
Shock DVD

While we are romping through history, we should remember that the overall theme has already been explored in Terry Gilliam's wonderful "Time Bandits". Co-written with Michel Palin, the 1981 film manages to lampoon time travellers, good and bad, Creation, and a number of periods of time and historical figures. This is pretty much what you would expect from a bunch of ex-Monty Pythons.

The story is of a group of dwarves who have stolen a map of The Firmament. It was built in a rush job, since it had to be done in only six days, and there are weaknesses in reality where time portals open and close. The map shows where these are. The dwarves intend to use the portals to go from era to era looting and pillaging. They accidentally pick up an English schoolboy, Kevin, along the way. One time portal opens in the back of his bedroom closet. From here the story is a set of brief interludes with some great actors playing cameo roles.

There is the height-obsessed Napoleon (Ian Holm) who knows the height of every world conqueror and has noted that they are all short, like him. So why is everyone else so tall?

Sean Connery plays King Agamemnon. He is quite willing to adopt young Kevin as his son until the dwarves snatch Kevin away again. John Cleese turns in a great performance as the



The Map

vacuous insincere politician Robin Hood. "So you're a robber, are you? How long have you been a robber? Four foot one? That's a long time"

All is not well, though. The Supreme Being wants his map back as it shows a way to release the Evil One from his Fortress of Ultimate Darkness. The Evil One wants to be free as he thinks the Supreme Being has lost his touch and become obsessed with things like forty three varieties of parakeet and nipples on men. If he can take over the world he can run it on truly efficient technological lines. There will be a confrontation where Kevin will learn a lot about true friendship.

Time Bandits is a great film in the best Monty Python tradition. Unfortunately it is not as well-known as, say, Life of Brian, but even though it was made around thirty years ago it is still worth revisiting.



The Bandits

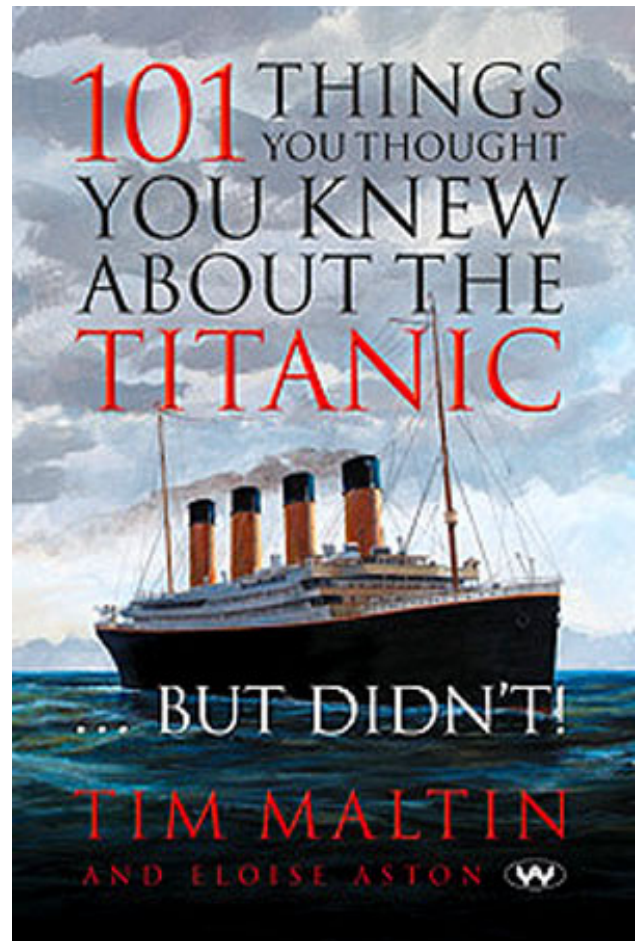
**101 Things You Thought You Knew About
The Titanic ...But Didn't**
by Tim Maltin and Eloise Aston
Wakefield Press 2010

The Titanic disaster seems to have raised an incredible number of theories, misinformation and just plain lies than almost any other disaster in history. In an event such as this people have different memories of what happened depending on their location and viewpoint at the time. There will therefore be conflicts or inconsistencies in their stories. These are seized on by the conspiracy theorists and whole alternate scenarios built up.

This highly detailed book looks at the various myths and "facts" surrounding the disaster and tries to make sense of them by the simple expedient of going in search of the truth. The records are there – the authors make extensive use of the records of both the American and British enquiries – and are extensively quoted. Surprisingly some of the "myths" are true, as recounted in witness statements. Others seem based more on the money to be made from a good story, and of course there is always the political angle. The book covers all of these.

The British enquiry seems to have been a white-wash to cover up the inadequate safety precautions set by the British Board of Trade. The evidence presented here and the comments made by the enquiry members differ from the American enquiry and this is fertile ground for conspiracy theory. It is up to the authors to straighten out the inconsistencies. They point out, for instance, that the safety regulations as regard lifeboats were based on the assumption that new ships divided into watertight compartments would be virtually unsinkable. Passengers would be safer on the ship. The idea that a number of these compartments could be holed at the same time (as happened to the Titanic) was not considered. It is this evenhanded approach by the authors that sets the book apart from more simplified histories.

The various myths about the ship's safety and standard of construction are examined in detail. There is sufficient evidence presented in the book to show that safety was important to the White Star line and the catastrophe was partly the result of circumstances that were simply unforeseen in the designers' extensive experience.



The book goes on to look at the voyage itself, the Captain, the crew and the rescue. As befitted a new prestige ship the company put some of its best men in charge. Many accusations were levelled at the Captain but he appears from the information in the book to have been a fine seaman, skilled and experienced. Some myths surrounding him seem to be based more on a search for a scapegoat than on fact. It is true that he had no experience in handling such a large ship, but neither did anyone else. Ships like the Titanic pushed the envelope for size, speed and power.

The details of the wireless calls and the response of nearby ships is well explained. Those ships that could respond did so, and those that didn't had good reasons for their inability. Even the myth of the "ghost ship" supposedly sighted near the sinking ship is adequately explained by the facts – if you bother to look for them, as the authors have. The disaster is covered thoroughly by witness statements. Special attention is given to the story about "not enough lifeboats". The results involve looking at the details of ship construction and layout, the procedures



followed to launch the lifeboats, even how many passengers a lifeboat could hold while it was being lowered before it would break up. The results are surprising but revealing.

The book is a pleasure to read. When I put it down I felt I knew much more about the disaster and its causes because of the simple, clear explanations and the wealth of background. Only the most hardened conspiracy theorist could fail to accept its conclusions. It is based on information, not speculation. We need more books like this.

Creepy Images Volume #4 June 2010

Creepy Images is one of the only cinema magazines dedicated to movie paraphernalia.

It includes reprints of posters, lobby cards, press books and other related items with a brief introduction to each film.

Each issue is in full colour and literally jumps off the page offering the very best in printing quality.

This issue is 64 pages, having added a further 12 pages of content. It includes an amazing mix of films as well as an excellent article on Italian Giallo cinema by Jeremy Mincer.



The magazine opens with *Paura Nella Città dei Morti Viventi*, Lucio Fulci's second Living Dead film. While there may be only one poster, there are some 24 lobby cards and a 4 page press book to support the film.

This is followed by *Blue Holocaust* (*Buio Omega*) and then a very comprehensive overview of Italian Giallo called "Giallo by Design", which is not only informative but packed with posters and art.

Las Hijas de Dracula (*Vampires*) is next with some lovely promotional items, erotica and dark, followed by Amando de Ossorio's *The Return of the Blind Dead* (*El Ataque de Los Muertos Sin Ojos*).

The last film covered is *The Plague of the Zombies*, a classic Hammer title which has some lovely promotional posters and lobby cards.

Back issues are also available. So build your collection today. Issues 1-3 are superb additions to any film lovers library.

Web: <http://www.creepy-images.com/>



DVD Delirium 4 FAB Press

DVD Delirium has proved itself time and time again to be the definitive guide to genre cinema on DVD. It really is the ultimate fan's guide to cult home entertainment and is treasured by all film lovers. If you are developing a library of unusual DVDs, whether it be cult, horror or exploitation, there really is no other guide on the market which comes close to this series.



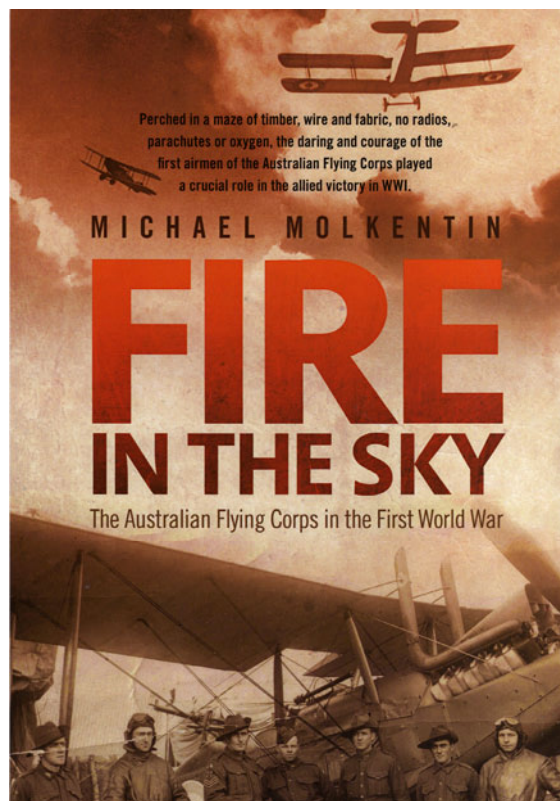
It all began with DVD Delirium One in the early days of DVD and has now reached volume four which includes Blu Ray reviews. Volume Four does not duplicate entries from the first three volumes but complements them by adding new entries as well as details of deletions, new additions and new versions.

One of the most impressive aspects of this series has been its comparisons between different editions of films. Most films are released in different versions in different regions. DVD Delirium compares PAL and NTSC format editions, special features, languages and available subtitles and, most significantly, the picture and audio quality of the various editions. Each film included has a comprehensive synopsis so you really get a feel for what each film is about. The descriptions are extensive enough that you can make an informed decision about the films you want to see and the very best editions to purchase.

DVD Delirium is not about the banality of Hollywood or mainstream films, it focuses on the sort of movies Synergy readers love. Cult, horror, exploitation, arthouse, erotic, thriller, action, foreign language, and just plain eccentric and weird movies.

The films are nicely presented in alphabetical listings with a small cover image of each movie. There are lots of rare and unusual films which will set the mind of the collector abuzz.

Web: <http://www.fabpress.com>

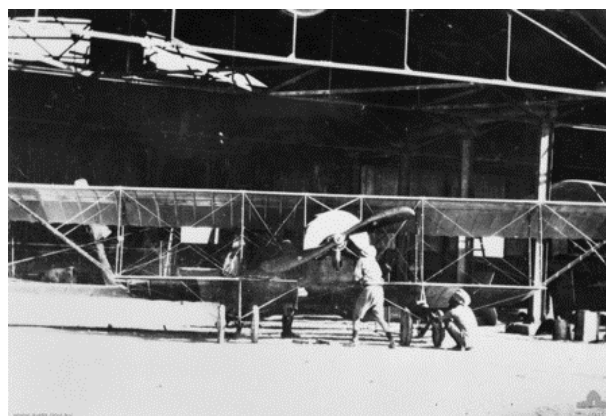


Fire In The Sky The Australian Flying Corps in The First World War Michael Molkentin Allen & Unwin 2010

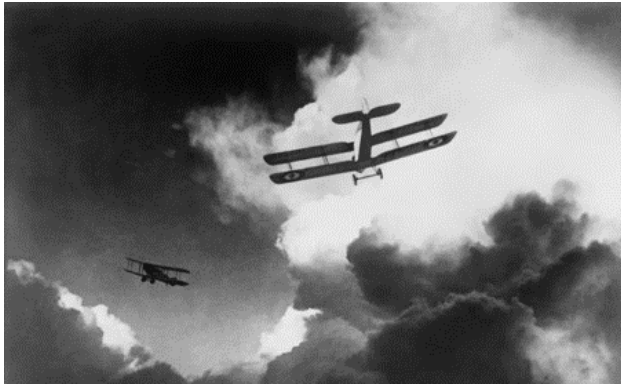
'I half rolled, and there before my eyes was as perfect a target as I had ever seen in my life. A pressure of a thumb, a short burst, a puff of smoke, a flash of flame, a hole on the clouds-and it was over.'

Lieutenant Robert McKenzie, No. 2 Squadron Australian Flying Corps.

In this book Michael Molkentin gives us a



Mechanics with a Caudron aircraft in Mesopotamia, 1916.



Two AFC Bristols in flight.

detailed description of the development of the Australian Flying Corps during World War I. The history of this group, which later became the Royal Australian Air Force, is little known apart from the usual dry war histories. Molkentin has used much original correspondence from the aircrews and mechanical staff to give a far more personal account of a war that Australia was unprepared for. The first flight in Australia had occurred only in 1910.

In so doing, Molkentin points out that returning airmen gave Australia an appreciation of just how much air transport could do in a huge country like Australia. This gave us organizations like QANTAS, the Air Ambulance and regular passenger air services. Australia rapidly became one of the most air-minded nations in the world. It is hard to imagine the roots of an international airline like QANTAS being in a Bristol fighter plane over Mesopotamia in 1918, but the Australian Flying Corps gave us the nucleus of men and experience to achieve this.

The value of aircraft for reconnaissance and spotting was realised early over the battlefields of Europe, but the first Australian squadron went into action over Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) harassing Turkish troops and supply lines. They used old aircraft on loan from the RAF and although they were intended to be for reconnaissance only the pilots and observers soon found that dropping bombs on the troops below was quite practical. The pilots were often drawn from ground troops with some sort of mechanical background.

They were also selected on the basis of map reading skills and other talents which may prove useful in the air. They often had an adventurous spirit that suited the new form of warfare. The

training that the men were given at the new Point Cook base was cursory and hampered by few aircraft and instructors who were themselves undertrained and inexperienced. Any experience in wartime flying was gained on the job. While ground troops were fighting desperately at Gallipoli, fliers were carrying the air war to Mesopotamia where they provided invaluable information for the British advance up the Tigris river. There are many anecdotes given in the book that show the Australians' rather casual attitude to discipline but their serious attitude to their work. One example is given where an aircraft crew was tasked to destroy the telegraph line going up the river. Rather than drop inaccurate bombs on it they landed next to the line and attached their bombs to the poles. While doing so they were suddenly attacked by Bedouins who seemed to come out of nowhere. It became a tradition that as far as possible they would land and rescue the crew of a downed aircraft in spite of the danger to themselves. Many anecdotes of this dangerous practice are included in the book.

They were first exposed to air combat in Mesopotamia when the Germans brought in some Pfalz scout aircraft (early fighters) to try to curb the losses being inflicted on the ground troops by the Australians. The Pfalz was a greatly superior aircraft to those of the Australians. Again Molkentin lets the pilots' memoirs and letters tell the story, giving us a valuable insight into the aircraft, tactics and attitudes of the flyers. Air combat introduced a problem that would plague pilots right through the war. The RAF refused to provide aircrew with parachutes, fearing that it may encourage a lack of moral fibre and crew might bail out rather than stay in their aircraft and fight. This attitude led to the deaths of many aircrew who could otherwise have been saved. The constant tension also led to the first cases of "aero-neurosis", the mental breakdown caused by the constant risk of death.

When the squadrons were sent to Egypt and the Sinai the experience was not much different but by now the opposition had hardened. Large scale air battles were still rare, but anti-aircraft fire from ground troops was becoming fierce. Since their main task was air support for the ground troops there was a lot of low level flying involved and the casualties mounted. Over such a large battle area the aircraft came into

its own as the eyes of the Headquarters staff, constantly ferrying information on troop movements, reinforcements and the success or otherwise of taking objectives. At least the aircraft were improving, with specialised bomber aircraft now being introduced accompanied by better fighters.

The book spends almost half its space on the battles of the Middle East and a picture emerges of an Air Corps dedicated to doing a thorough job against increasing odds. Many airmen felt an affinity for the ground troops they supported, having come from infantry regiments themselves. By the time the squadrons were sent to the Western Front the pilots, observers and ground crews had the hard core of battle-toughened veterans that they would need to survive a more deadly form of war.

The German aircraft were superior, especially the Fokker DVII, and reconnaissance and photography missions over the front were always dangerous. It wasn't until some squadrons were reequipped with the new Sopwith Camel that the balance changed back. With increasing numbers of aircraft ranged along the front, the massive "dogfight" began to appear. The pilots' memoirs show that the aircraft were still frail, the action was incredibly fast, and the life of an inexperienced pilot was short. The percentage death rate of aircrew was approaching that of the ground troops. The experienced pilots still remained laconic..

"I went into the cloud again and when I came out the bastard was just above me. So I pulled up the bus (aircraft) and blew the observer's bum through the back of his neck"

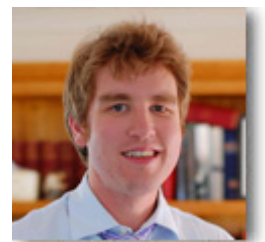
The Australian squadrons had their own sections of the Front to guard and the Germans would move their increasingly stretched squadrons around to cover more territory. It was in a combat in the Australian sector that Manfred von Richthofen, the "Red Baron" was shot down. He was buried with full military honours, an act that rankled with Australian airmen. When an Australian pilot died he was sewn up into his blanket and give a hasty burial so his death would not demoralise the other aircrew. It rankled with the French as well. On the night following the funeral they destroyed the grave. I was not aware of this little fragment of history until reading this book.

The book also delves into the aftermath of the war. The mechanics did fairly well in peacetime, having worked on some of the finest engines in the world during the war. For many aircrew, however, peace brought problems. They were not really trained for anything else. Some made a small living barnstorming around the country. One airdropped the city newspapers to country towns along the Murray River from an aircraft. Hudson Fysh formed the Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service that later grew into QANTAS.

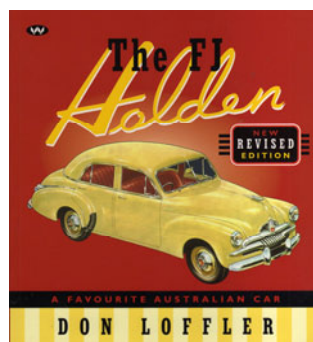
In 1921 the Royal Australian Air Force was formed to retain the skills of the air and ground crew. This took up a lot of the demobilised AFC staff, but many just faded into an undeserved obscurity. As a result the history of the Australian Flying Corps has also fallen into obscurity. Hopefully Michael Molkentin's book will remedy that.

Michael Molkentin

Michael Molkentin is a prize-winning historian, teacher and battlefield tour guide. He has a degree in History from the University of Wollongong. His work on Australian military history has also appeared in the Journal of the Australian War Memorial, Wartime, Teaching History and Cross and Cockade International. Michael was a featured contributor in the ABC documentary *Lost in Flanders* and has been the recipient of research scholarships from the Australian War Memorial, the NSW Government and the University of New South Wales.



**The FJ Holden
New Revised
Edition
Don Loffler
Wakefield Press
2010**



When Don Loffler wrote "The FJ Holden" in 2002 he can't have realised what he had started. His book became the definitive work on this Australian icon, but since then he has been flooded with more photos and information. This revised and updated edition became a necessity. As Don says in his foreword, "The fact that I have now written over 150,000 words and published more than 1500 photographs solely on the "FX" and FJ models illustrates how deeply these iconic Holdens are embedded in the Australian psyche".

Don's lavish but careful selection of photos and advertising highlights why this is so. It was a measure of Australia's progress that we could now produce our own car and that it was at least partly designed for our atrocious road conditions. The range of options and colours ensured that your new FJ Holden could be made distinctively yours.

We looked at two of Don's books on the early Holdens in last year's Christmas edition of Synergy. In this revised edition the amount of detail has been increased, as has the anecdotes of FJ owners. The book as it is now is packed with information that will make it invaluable for restorers and collectors. The details that Don has collected from the GM-H archives comprehensively lists the variations, options, paint schemes and other facts that collectors need to accurately describe their models. Many restorers have provided information on the FJ's problem areas and ways to fix them.

Unlike many purist collectors. Don does not ignore the models that have been privately customised as hot rods, stretch limousines or other variants. The FJ has been around for a long time and it is only natural that when cheap FJs were plentiful someone would try their hand at customising one to their own preferences. There is even a short section on panel van bodies that have been converted to car trailers.

Don points out that he has also received many more photos of drivers and their FJs, too many to include even in this revised edition. Accordingly he has not made changes to the photos, only the text. Many of the new photos were used in his fourth book "Me And My Holden" which is more of a photographic essay. He intends to use many more in his new book, scheduled for 2012.



"The FJ Holden" is truly a labour of love. Without dedicated researchers and enthusiasts like Don Loffler we would not have so much information on these important pieces of Australia's history and culture.

**Girls and Corpses
Volume 4
Summer**

Girls and Corpses is one of those magazines which is truly unique. When you see it, you will not believe your eyes. Freud talked about "sex and death" but it is only Robert Steven Rhine (Corpsy) who would think of bringing it to life in such extravagance. Corpses and beautiful girls litter the pages' surprising, stimulating and shocking us in equal measures.



There is a dark sense of humour which imbues every issue. This one is "Out of this World" and the corpses have a distinctly alien appearance. There are lots of superb cartoons and illustrations as well as an excellent range of articles. There is a full colour sexy death spread in Jersey Gore at the shore and a marvellous exploration of Alien Sex in mythology, film, urban legend and perhaps even fact ? The centre fold and picture spread is called Alien Autopsy and is accompanied with a mad scientist and beautiful babes and A day at the beach with my (dead) ex.

Interviews include Eli Roth on his new movie

The Last Exorcism, Harland Williams, Gorgeous Frankenstein (ex-misfits axemen Doyle Wolfgang von Frankenstein and his wife), artist Mark Cooper (Mindrape), Takashi Miike (Ichii the Killer and other controversial cinema classics), Jeane Trend-Hill (author of Silent Cities) and Blood Painter, Nicolas Rabier.

Articles including a fascinating one on mounting animals and taxidermy, a superbly done dark cartoon by Robert Steven Rhine called Anna and a great article on Sexy Freaks. I have never felt it was fair that people who are physically different should be discouraged from being sexually adventurous and these lovely ladies prove it is possible to take a disability and turn it into a fetish, awesome !

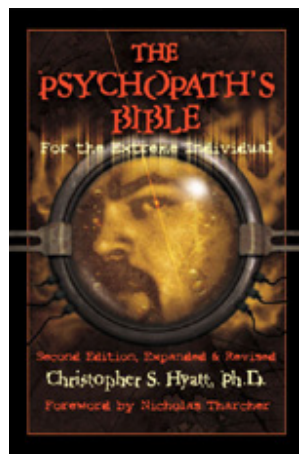
Web: <http://www.girlsandcorpses.com>

The Psychopaths Bible
Christopher Hyatt
New Falcon Press

In the most of the world, psychopaths have gotten a bad rap. That, of course, is quite understandable since almost all of the world's religious and social philosophies have little use for the individual except as a tool to be placed in service to their notion of something else: 'God,' or the 'collective,' or the 'higher good' or some other equally undefinable term. Only rarely, such as in Zen; in Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism; in some aspects of Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism; and in some schools of Existentialism, is the individual considered primal. Here, finally, is a book which celebrates, encourages and educates the best part of ourselves.

Christopher Hyatt in **The Psychopath's Bible**

Christopher was a true "maverick", while trained in psychology, psychotherapy and related fields he is best known for his creation of the "Extreme Individual institute". Hyatt's approach to life was idiosyncratic and eccentric melding psychology, occultism and a radical sense of narcissism. While most other religious, philosophical and psychological system advocated collectivism and submitting to the will of the populace for the



betterment of mankind Hyatt argues for true, untrammelled individualism.

In *The Psychopath's Bible* Hyatt offers a convincing argument for the truly self-centred life. It is a book that certainly bites. It avoids pleasant-ries and shows life as it is truly is. Many will find it confronting and even offensive. In many ways this was Hyatt's goal. Even the choice of the title was to warn off the wary and only attract those who are outsiders and understand what he is on about. The book itself is a mixture of scathing social commentary, homespun wisdom and practical advice on how to live as a true individual (or Toxic Magician as Hyatt likes to use the term) within a culture based on bland conformity. Hyatt gives all sorts of advice on how to take advantage of a world where stupidity abounds. He also clearly warns of the dangers of taking total responsibility for ourselves; something most people will never do.

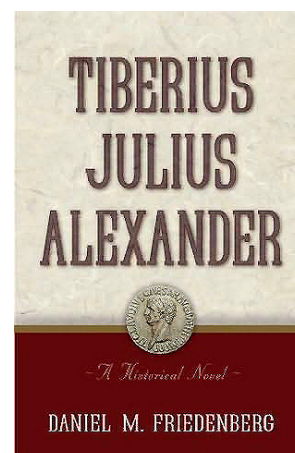
There is also a very practical guide to books, films and resources which will put you in the right frame of mind to take on the world. Hyatt's view of the world may not be palatable to many, but the fact is we are all somewhere on the food chain and have to decide whether to eat or be eaten. A fascinating and challenging read.

Hyatt has also written a series of "Black Books" and we will review them in a future issue of Synergy.

Order from: <http://www.originalfalcon.com/>

Tiberius Julius Alexander
Daniel M
Friedenberg
Prometheus Books
2010

This book gives a rather unusual look at the peak of Roman power in the eastern Mediterranean. Tiberius Julius Alexander was an Egyptian Jew living in Alexandria, at that time the most exciting place to be outside Rome itself. His father was of great service to the Romans and was awarded the right to add Julius to the family names, a great honour. He may have been a



customs official of some sort but in the book he is described as a very successful trader.

Young Tiberius is a more academic type. He is interested in the mix of religions in the area and has reached the conclusion that there is no one religion, that they all draw from each other and from previous cults and religions. He is at odds with his father and his uncle over this. They are dedicated Jews and believe in one God, not the pantheon of Gods worshiped by the Greeks in the city and by the Romans. They believe that the Torah is the literal word of Yahweh and the commentaries are written under his divine inspiration. Tiberius has difficulties with this simplistic explanation since his researches clearly show that stories in the Torah are derived from many earlier sources.

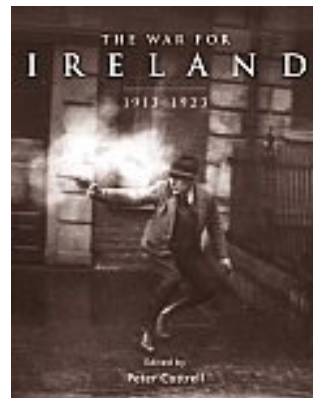
Religious tension in the city is growing between the Greeks and the Jews and there may be a revolt brewing in neighbouring Judea. To avoid the unpleasantness Tiberius' father ships him off to Rome where he meets people of influence and power. Tiberius' skill with languages makes him valuable to the Romans and he gradually rises in power, taking a major role in the re-invasion of Britain under the Emperor Claudius. To achieve such power he has had to swear allegiance to the deified Roman Emperors like Caligula and Nero and this has completely severed his relations with his family. They believe there is only one God so to swear allegiance to a Roman Emperor turned God is apostasy.

This allows him more freedom in his successive jobs, now he is free of the trappings and beliefs of religion. Although he continues to study the region's religions with interest it is more as an outside observer than as a believer. He rises up the Roman bureaucracy, becoming in time Procurator of Egypt and then second in command of the Roman legions trying to squash the Jewish revolt. In his middle age, though, something happens that forces him to re-examine his lack of belief.

It is hard to resist comparing the book to Robert Graves' *I Claudius* but it is a much wider view of Roman history, not just an inward looking view of the ruling classes. As such it puts much of the Roman history and people of the period into a personal context as seen by Tiberius. The constant religious friction is plausible and

the irrationality of the Jewish zealots comes across as quite believable. Friedenberg has researched the history and background thoroughly and produced a good story of Roman history as well as a first class novel.

**The War For
Ireland 1913 – 1923
Edited by Peter
Cottrell
Osprey Publishing**



Like many people I always looked on the violence in Ireland as a religious thing – Protestants versus Catholics. I wasn't aware of the place of organizations like the Irish Republican Army, Sinn Féin, Clan na Gael and the many others – newspapers portrayed them all as gangsters and for lack of better information that is what I accepted. Now this book does a very credible job of putting all the conflicts into context and gives an understanding of the serious problems confronting the Irish people.

It is interesting that Cottrell has called the book "The War FOR Ireland". This emphasises a point that is made time after time throughout the book. There was indeed a military war going on but it only ever seemed to involve a small number of radicals. The main battle was for the hearts and minds of the Irish people themselves, and mostly the people were disinterested in the posturings of the combatants.

The background to the problem goes well back in history when mostly Catholic Ireland was conquered by mostly Protestant Britain. Although Catholics were disenfranchised and often treated badly the situation improved over the years and the standard of living started to rise. Many people moved to cities where the availability of employment, often regardless of religion, gave them a chance at a decent life. Always in the background there was a group of troublemakers whose beliefs were not religious but political.

They wanted an independent Ireland completely free of the British and gradually they grew more militaristic about it. Groups sprang up dedicated to complete independence or at least

home rule as a separate state in Great Britain. These Unionists were regarded as traitors by the Nationalists and slowly a call to arms began. Yet, when given a vote on the Union treaty, most Irish voted for it in the hope that it may at least bring some sort of peace to the country. It was a vain hope.

During World War 1 a large number of Irish enlisted in the British Army. These often formed the nucleus of the paramilitary groups on both sides. Organisers of the groups came to believe that the best way to change public opinion was with a show of strength that would cause the British to overreact. An uprising was planned for Easter 1916. Patrick Pearse, the organiser, seems to have believed that all he had to do was declare a Republic and all Irish would immediately turn to the cause. Instead the Irish greeted the "revolution" with disinterest. Pearse declared himself President of the Provisional Government. Only around a thousand of his soldiers turned up but they occupied a few strategic locations in Dublin such as the Post Office. The British Army, with quite a few Irish soldiers in its own ranks, spent a few days winking them out.

The mass uprising that Pearse wanted just didn't occur. Cottrell paints a picture of fragmented battles, occasional atrocities and dreadful planning and communications. He details many of the individual actions and it becomes obvious how painfully unprepared the British were to fight an urban guerrilla war. Generally the captured "soldiers" were treated as civil criminals, not as military combatants – an attitude that continued for many decades afterwards.

Events now took a more sinister turn. The new leaders felt that they had to become more active in the field. This included attacking civil servants such as policemen and members of opposing organizations. This began a series of reprisals by the British that culminated in the execution of high ranking officials and came to look more like the violence that we saw in the late 1900s. The IRA newspaper told its readers that it was their duty to kill soldiers and policemen. The dreaded reprisal killings began to appear from both sides. A rebel "government", the Dail, was set up to compete with the legitimate government for influence and tax revenue. Where they could not raise money in other ways some groups indulged in bank robbery to



fund their activities. More and more civilians were being caught in the crossfire and the reprisals.

Finally in 1922 the British Government proposed a partition of Ireland. A number of predominantly Protestant counties in the north would become a separate province of the United Kingdom. A group in the south would become a mostly Catholic province with a certain amount of home rule. In the June 1922 referendum 78% of the Irish voted for this partition. This, however, had the unfortunate effect of creating religious ghettos in the major cities and was to cause further problems. Both sides, making the best of the situation, claimed victory.

Although the book nominally finishes at 1923 Cottrell provides us with a further brief history showing how the political violence gradually turned to sectarian strife. It seems the Irish people just wouldn't accept a British solution, and couldn't accept an Irish solution either. This developed into the violence shown so often on our TV screens in the late 1900s. British Army troops would be tied up for decades, becoming in the process some of the world's best anti-incursion soldiers. The IRA became increasingly marginalised and its leaders became regarded as thugs and their atrocities became less acceptable. Pressure mounted on the Government to wind back its activities in areas such as the horrific prison system. The old hatreds may still live on but they are tempered by the need to get along with each other to survive.

Cottrell gives us descriptions of the battles, the people and the politics. He paints a broad picture that gives a more through understanding of the war for this long-suffering country.

Animal Kingdom Madman R4

This is director David Michod's first feature film but if it's a good example of his work then we will see much more of him. He has given us a tightly constructed crime film about a predatory family and their twisted family values.

Seventeen year old Josh (J) watches his mother die from a drug overdose. There is only one person he can turn to - his grandmother Janine (Jackie Weaver). She immediately takes him in and we meet the rest of her family. There is the family friend Baz - he does holdups, but has sensibly invested some of the money in the stock market where he is making more money than he does from hold-ups. Darren is his younger brother. He does hold-ups and drugs. He is easily led and is often stoned out of his mind anyway. So does Craig, who is almost Josh's age - they used to play together. Pope is the evil one. He is sly, backstabbing and the family troublemaker. He seems to be a bit mentally unbalanced. Janine, however, loves them all and tolerates their little quirks.

The Armed Robbery Squad doesn't. It is not having much success stopping robberies or getting convictions in court so some rogue detectives are simply gunning down the criminals.

When Bazz is murdered by the police, who claim he had a gun, Pope urges revenge. Two general duties police officers are gunned down



in an ambush and the wrath of the police force falls on the brothers. One detective senses Josh is just an innocent party caught up in the family business. If he can be turned he may give them the evidence to lock up the brothers. Pope, however, is suspicious and urges the family to get rid of Josh in case he is an informer. This will also involve killing Josh's girlfriend in case Josh has told her anything.

Now Janine must decide between Josh and her sons. Josh must defend himself against hardened criminals, the police and crooked lawyers.

The film is superbly acted. Jackie Weaver gives the best performance of her career as the dotting but fiercely protective grandmother. Ben Mendelsohn as Pope is truly menacing. James Frecheville as Josh at first seems a little wooden in his acting, but that's just the shock of losing his mum and being taken into a criminal environment that he is not equipped to deal with. All the actors give quality performances that belie the independent nature of the film.

There is a little more blood than U.S. audiences would usually see and grandma's idea of "family values" is not their style either, but it all adds up to a strong, gripping piece of drama.



As Good As Dead
Reel DVD
R4 DVD

Although it isn't big budget this film carries the suspense and dread to high levels. It is quite bloody and graphic but if you can handle that it is a superb film.



Years ago a white supremacist minister in America's deep south was executed by a small group of extremists. His wife (Andie McDowell) suffered horrible burns when the killers threw a petrol bomb in the car. Now she, her twenty year old son and a hired killer Aaron who was inspired by the reverend's rantings are out for revenge. They have tracked down one of the killers and tortured him to reveal the names of the two others. He has given them the name of Ethan (Cary Elwes), a down-on-his-luck photographer with whom he used to work.

The trio captures Ethan and tortures him to reveal the name of the third member of the gang. The wife is, of course, still a woman of good Christian values even though she wants revenge and won't stop at torture and murder to get it. Try as he might, Ethan cannot convince them that they have the wrong man. They are so convinced of his guilt that his denials and apparent lack of knowledge of what happened are just lies to them.

The torture continues and Ethan's neighbour is also caught and killed. Ethan's despair deepens. Finally the woman realises that she may be turning her son into a murderer and becomes convinced of Ethan's innocence, but Aaron (Frank Whaley) continues on his rampage. He is



especially interested when he finds Ethan has a wife and daughter and threatens to kill them both. He is still convinced that Ethan is the killer. Ethan really is as good as dead and it's only that one missing name that is keeping him alive. Is he tough enough to come through this alive?

Director Jonathan Mossek has given us a large dose of closeup blood and torture but I can't criticise this as it is essential for building up the mood of the film. It may, however, put some people off.

I have not been particularly impressed with Cary Elwes before but this film really shows off his ability. Frank Whaley is also noteworthy for his great performance as the psychotic but dedicated killer. I can't say I was impressed as much by Andie McDowell but I think a lot of that was due to the annoying southern drawl she had to adopt for the film. It may be familiar to U.S. viewers but it grates on the ears of non-U.S. people. Apart from that she is an accomplished actress. So there it is. Some really good actors proving once again that a low budget is no obstacle to a good performance.

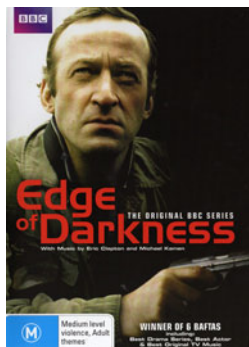


Edge of Darkness
ABC DVD
Roadshow Entertainment
R4 DVD

This TV show dates back to 1985 and was recently remade as a film starring Mel Gibson in the U.S.. The remake was pretty good, but having now seen the original version I can't see why they bothered. It is one of the earlier examples of the big corporations and corrupt government versus the little man genre. Troy Kennedy Martin's story is as current now as it was then. His work included the long-running and innovative police show *Z Cars* and the script for the early version of the film *The Italian Job*.

The plot is long and complex as you would imagine for a six-part series. Simplified, police detective Ronny Craven's daughter has got involved with an anti-nuclear group, Gaia. They are particularly concerned with a nuclear waste storage area in an old mine called Northmoor. It is run by a private corporation and currently the subject of a takeover bid by a U.S. firm. A local reservoir has been closed because of nuclear contamination, but it is blamed on a Government nuclear facility many miles away. One night as Craven is returning home with his daughter a gunman steps from the shadows and fires both barrels of a shotgun at them. His daughter runs towards the gunman and receives the full force of the shots. She dies in Craven's arms. The post mortem reveals that she had been exposed to a massive dose of radiation.

Craven should be excluded from the investigation but strangely he is allowed, even encouraged, to continue his own enquiries. He meets Darius Jedburgh, an experienced CIA agent who has a file on Northmoor. Jedburgh is concerned that Northmoor is producing plutonium illegally and some of the byproducts are leaking. He has a conscience about such matters and he distrusts the president of the company that wants to buy Northmoor. Craven also discovers that his daughter and a group of Gaia scientists have tried to penetrate Northmoor through the old mine tunnels and been flushed out by a massive dose of radioactive water. It is this water that contaminated the reservoir.



At higher levels a government cover-up seems to be going on. There is an enquiry about to start regarding the purchase of the Northmoor facility and nothing must be allowed to stop it recommending the sale. The U.S. government itself may be involved. It desperately needs plutonium. The British government seems prepared to admit to fault in the nuclear leakage, Craven's attempted killing is being blamed on IRA terrorists seeking revenge for his earlier career, and even Craven's sanity is being called into question. There are government staff, particularly the enigmatic Pendleton and Harcourt, who appear to support Craven and his investigation. With the coverup Craven can't get a warrant to enter Northmoor so he has only one choice – he must go down the mines himself and try to do what his daughter couldn't. He knows that the Northmoor security force is getting information on his investigation and actions and will be waiting for him. Jedburgh and a compromised Miners Union official will be his companions. I won't give away the rest of the plot but it is a long and frustrating time for Craven. Like his daughter he may have to give his life to make Northmoor public. Jedburgh himself may be compromised by orders from his government.

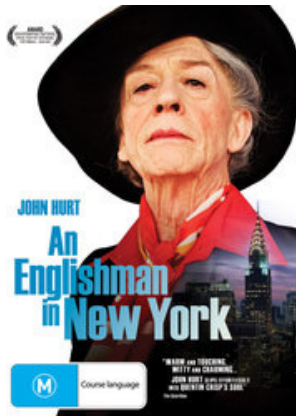
The lead actors are, every one of them, brilliant in their roles. Bob Peck as Craven is perfect as the mild but determined police officer. Joe Don Baker as Jedburgh plays the part of the brash CIA agent so well that his later extreme activities in the series are quite believable. Charles Kay and Ian McNiece as Pendleton and Harcourt are smooth (too smooth?) but savagely competent and their roles do not become clear until much later in the series. The show is quality drama at its best, and frankly it has far more suspense than the later U.S. production. The U.S. version was good but when compared with the depth of the original, just doesn't have the same presence as Bob Peck.



An Englishman in New York
QC Cinema
Beyond Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Health consists of having the same diseases as one's neighbours.

Quentin Crisp



John Hurt brought Quentin Crisp to life in *The Naked Civil Servant*. It seems an amazing to say but it was a film that changed, indeed saved, so many lives. Many gay people living in isolation saw their first glance of a strong and resilient homosexual in Crisp, a man who against all odds fought to be who he was. It was a powerful film made in 1975, a time when only a very few movies dared to show homosexuality in a positive light. So many gay people saw this and decided to be true to who they were and left the country and headed towards the city, San Francisco in America, London in England and Sydney in Australia. Crisp gave hope to a generation, even if it was a realistic and sharp edged hope.

In 2009 John Hurt has returned to portray the latter years of Crisp's life in *An Englishman in New York*. Crisp makes a decision nobody expects. Late in life and infirm, he describes to move to New York to start again. He here meets Philip Steele, the editor of the *Village Voice*, with whom he forms a lifelong friendship. While this film is certainly about the later life of Quentin Crisp, it is just as much about the significance of friendship and the deep bond he formed with Philip Steele and which lasted until his death.

You fall out of your mother's womb, you crawl across open country under fire, and drop into your grave.

Quentin Crisp

Crisp was an enigma; bitchy, generous, venomous, witty, a lover of adulation and yet a loner. He spoke his mind and sometimes would make an offhand comment which would haunt him for years later.

His comment that "AIDS was a Fad" singlehandedly destroyed his career for many years even



Quentin Crisp

though it was meant in jest. Too often people saw Crisp as a driving force for Gay rights and demanded he be so. They put him on a pedestal and then tried to keep him nailed there even when he tried to get off. Crisp simply say himself as a "lover of men" with no political or social agenda attached. Much like Gore Vidal who said "I am a not gay, I am a homosexualist", Crisp had an uneasy relationship with the gay community. In the politically charged world of the New York gay community this led to many clashes. Crisps was ultimately a performer, a man who has struggled against all odds to be himself regardless of the cost. His life itself was inspirational without any need for a politically correct overlay or interpretation by queer theory.

Never keep up with the Joneses. Drag them down to your level.

Quentin Crisp

I always found Crisp's wit and humour truly inspiring and felt it, on occasion, even reached the level of Oscar Wilde. He had the ability to cut through the hypocrisy of life and see things as they really are. He is man who suffered greatly and yet was able to harness his fury and anger to create a persona of steel that entertained as well as informed others.

This is a marvellous film, Hurt is just perfect as Crisp. Since his role in *The Naked Civil Servant* and his personal friendship with Crisp, he has developed the uncanny ability to get inside Crisps psyche and reveal his inner life to us.

Most highly recommended.

Beneath Hill 60
The Silence
Productions
Paramount
R4 DVD

This new film looks at a group of unsung heroes, the miners and sappers of the trench warfare of World War I. Their job was to dig labyrinths of tunnels under enemy emplacements, fill them with explosives and detonate the huge mines to destroy the enemy above ground. This was particularly useful where frontal attacks had failed time after time.

The enemy of course would dig counter tunnels and listen for signs of tunnelling. If a tunnel was detected they would attack it either with explosives or sometimes by breaking into it and attacking with guns and grenades.

It was dark, dangerous and unhealthy work, every bit as dangerous as the fighting on the surface. It was not only the enemy that the tunnellers had to beware of. The need for speed in their work led to tunnels being dug hastily in poor soil and cave-ins were common. As one digger puts it in the film...

"At least we're back underground ...this is how it goes from now on.it's no game of skill down here neither. Get eaten by rats, get murdered by Fritz in the dark, get buried alive for



our fucking troubles."

The film is based on the true story of Captain Oliver Woodward, a mining engineer from Queensland who enlisted in the new 1st Australian Tunnelling Corps. It revolves around their attempt to destroy a German stronghold on Messines Ridge in Belgium that had proved impregnable to frontal assault.

Over a million pounds of explosive was placed in the tunnel and when fired it would destroy the entire ridge. It would be the biggest manmade explosion the world had yet seen. The Germans detected the sounds of tunnelling and prepared to countermine the Australian tunnel. It was a race against time, water and cave-ins to see who would succeed.

Brendan Cowell plays the role of Woodward with sympathy as a simple engineer who has to use his skills in war. For a film made on a modest but reasonable budget of less than nine million dollars it succeeds because of its high production values, strong script and historical background. It is a tribute to the four and a half thousand miners who did this dangerous job.



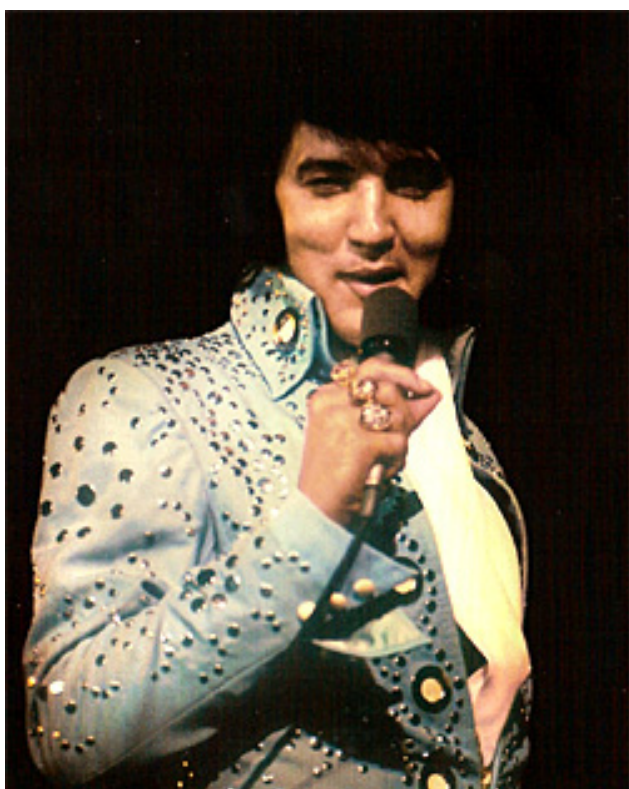
Elvis on Tour
Blu Ray
Warner Bros
Region B Australia

January 8, 2010, marked the seventy-fifth birthday of the late Elvis Presley and lots of new titles are hitting the market.



In 1972, Elvis Presley was still riding high from the rebirth of his live performances that began with the 1968 Comeback Special. Documentaries about his performances garnered great success and his previous documentary, *Elvis: That's The Way It Is* showed the King at the very height of his physical and vocal ability. Wanting to capture more of the King's magic, directors Robert Abel and Pierre Adidge followed Presley on his 15 cities in 15 nights 1972 tour. This resulted in Elvis' thirty third and final film, *Elvis on Tour*.

This is far more than a cinematic history of a concert performance, it gives us a personal behind-the-scenes look at how the tour operates with lots of backstage footage. While there are some twenty five musical numbers and you cannot fault the power of the concert performances,



it is the personal and candid moments which really makes this a unique film.

We see Presley just before he hits the stage, candid moments with the Memphis Mafia in his limousine, studio footage and footage of Presley and his band singing gospel songs on their off hours. A true highlight comes when Presley leads them through a rendition of "I, John." Gospel music moved Presley and it shows in these scenes.

The Blu Ray edition is of impeccable quality offering DTS HB 5.1 audio which really puts you in the centre of the experience. The package also includes 40 pages of photos, customs, set lists and trivia.

Iron Man 2
Paramount
R4 DVD

Iron Man 2 follows on six months after the first movie. It works to expand on the themes of the original film and add extra depth by exploring the ARC technology, the significance of S.H.I.E.L.D

and Stark's battles against the government as well as a nefarious Russian. It sustains the sarcastic wit of Robert Downey Jnr which gave the original film such an edge, without him the film would just be another superhero film.





Tony Stark has used his "Iron Man" suit to bring peace and praise from the public. While this has swelled his ego to breaking point it has also created an impasse with the government which doesn't like such a weapon in the hands of private enterprise.

When Stark is called before a government hearing, he humiliates Senator Stern (Gary Shandling) by proving that no other country is within ten years of developing the Iron man technology and along the way shames his rival Justin Hammer (Sam Rockwell) of Hammer technologies. While this is all well and good things are happening behind the scenes.

Stark is dying from the effect of the power generator at his heart and is having no success finding a replacement power source. In desperation he puts his personal assistant Pepper Potts (Gwyneth Paltrow) in charge of the company and retreats to the races in Monaco.

In Monaco he recklessly decides to take the company owned speedstar for a spin. Unbeknownst to Stark Ivan Vanko (Mickely Rourke) whose father was shafted by Star Industries appears to take revenge. He has built his own form of the Iron Man suit with long electro whips. Confronted by Vanko, Stark dons his outfit and takes control but not before world opinion has changed. The government is now terrified the technology of the suit is in private hands and public opinion turns against Stark seeing him as reckless.

Things go from bad to worse as he battles against the government who wants his technology, Hammer industries who have sprung Vanko from jail and are using him for their own

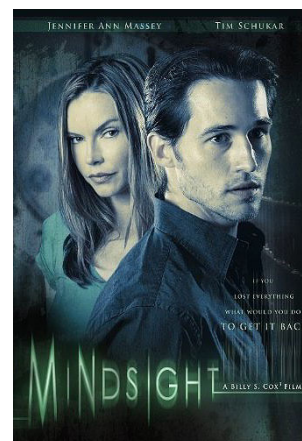
purposes and his own fast approaching demise.

He also has to deal with Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson) of S.H.I.E.L.D who confronts him about his reckless ways and imparts some well needed information about his father. Soon Stark discovers a new power source but only just in time as he must deal with robot minions Vanko has created for Hammer and with Vanko himself in a final showdown.

This is certainly a worthy sequel with solid character development shown in Stark, Vanko and even Pepper Potts. The new subplot involving S.H.I.E.L.D and their sexy secret agent works well and the action is at even more of a fever pitch than the first film. Iron Man 2 is a good mix of Hollywood blockbuster and a witty, intelligent action film, it is definitely worth seeing.

Mindsight **Echelon Studios** **R1 DVD**

Director Billy S Cox has come up with a first class revenge film with some nasty twists. He shows us how a perfectly normal man can be driven to abnormal lengths in his quest for revenge. In the end, does it make him a better man or is he as bad as the people he wants revenge on?



Tom and Gina lose their son to a drunken teenage driver. The kid was driving from a college frat party to pick up some condoms. While Tom can handle his son's death in his usual passive style, Gina falls apart. She wants someone to lash out at and in her irrationality she blames Tom – "*you didn't protect our son*". She accuses him of doing nothing about the teenager and withdraws from him into her tormented mind.

They attend the teenager's trial and Tom has a strange moment when he dreams he has a gun and is shooting the kid. In his dream a sheriff's officer and Gina are also killed in the crossfire. Tom is not the type to want revenge that seriously but Gina continues to pressure him to do



something – what exactly she can't say – and to question his love for her and their son.

Tom consults a friend, Brian, who is a minister. Tom was once a good Christian but has gradually drifted away from religion. Brian can offer nothing but the usual platitudes about "God's plan" and so on, but he does give Tom one piece of information. Tom's strange dream may be an example of Mindsight, a condition where the brain of someone under stress constructs a scenario that the dreamer may be wishing for. Mindsight, however, will also show the consequences of that scenario. *"The bad things that we want to happen only end up making things worse for us"*. There are always consequences.

Tom is both repelled by the idea of killing the teenager but at the same time under Gina's increasingly crazed pressure the idea starts to appeal to him. He is losing his wife and he has lost his child – what else is there to lose? From here we are not sure if Tom is doing what we see or if it is another episode of Mindsight.

He visits a couple of gangsters who give him details of a bank to hold up. The holdup goes smoothly and he sends the money to Gina, who is now a pill popping alcoholic – in fact she is



now worse than the teenage driver she wants revenge on.

Tom has gone to no trouble to hide his identity from the bank's security cameras so he is soon picked up and sentenced to prison. Now he is the same prison as the teenager, and can carry out his revenge plan. He kills the kid, but not before the kid asks him *"Have you ever done something stupid for a woman?"*. Yes, that's exactly what Tom is now doing for Gina. Tom will now get life for the murder. Are the consequences worth it? Fortunately it turns out to be just another episode of Mindsight.

Tom now evaluates the possibilities and when the teenager is let out of prison after only six years Tom is waiting for him with a gun. Is he going through another episode of Mindsight or is he now back in reality?

The story seesaws between reality and Mindsight and it is hard to tell which one we are seeing. Tom is aware of the consequences through his Mindsight but Gina is so consumed by the idea of driving Tom to take revenge she will not consider the outcomes. Religion is no help or comfort to Tom. *"Next time you pray ask God to forgive me. He stopped listening to me a*





Rescue Special Ops
Universal Pictures
Home Entertainment
R4

This TV series first went to air on the Australian Nine Network in 2009. It is currently into its second series, with a third series planned. It is based on a fictional rescue group of paramedics, a role that in reality is largely based on the State Emergency Services and the Police and Fire Brigade rescue units.

I admit I did not see the series when it first aired but now I can understand its success. It is well acted, fast paced and beautifully filmed. It is based in the Sydney area and full use is made of the magnificent scenery of the Blue Mountains and the rocky coastal cliffs. These are areas where people regularly come to grief so the settings for the TV show are quite believable.



The show also includes rescues and emergencies based on building sites, water accidents and the whole range of human stupidity. The Rescue Special Ops unit may not really exist but I have a new appreciation of how the real rescue units operate and the difficulties they face.

The interpersonal relationships of the characters and the pressures of the job on those relationships are a major part of each episode but the series shows how much these people rely on each other in their work. It could so easily degenerate into just another soapie but the writers manage to keep the action coming, so the relationships are just an important sideline. Sometimes it allows them to inject a touch of humour into an episode. Vince Marchello, for instance, is notorious for being able to arrange deals with the other emergency services. Inter-service jealousies often get a mention. All the characters are well-developed, not just superficially glossy as in too many of the U.S. series.

The only extra is the usual "Behind the Scenes". If I had to make a criticism it would be that the characters are just that little bit too attractive. Surely there must be one ugly worker in a group like this?



**Sanctuary
Series 2
Beyond Home Entertainment
R4 and Blu Ray**

Following the success of Series 1, the second series is now available. Series 1 introduced the Sanctuary network, an organization devoted to rescuing creatures that in the human world are regarded as monsters. The dangerous ones are quarantined, the harmless ones are given a safe place in the Sanctuary. Many of its residents are traditional monsters – werewolves, vampires, even mermaids – but many have other abilities such as teleportation and telekinesis. These abilities are worth money to anyone who can recover an “abnormal” as they are called and reengineer the genes that give them their unique qualities. At the end of Series 1 one such organization, the Cabal, was making a raid on the Sanctuaries with the aim of using the abnormalities’ abilities for world conquest.

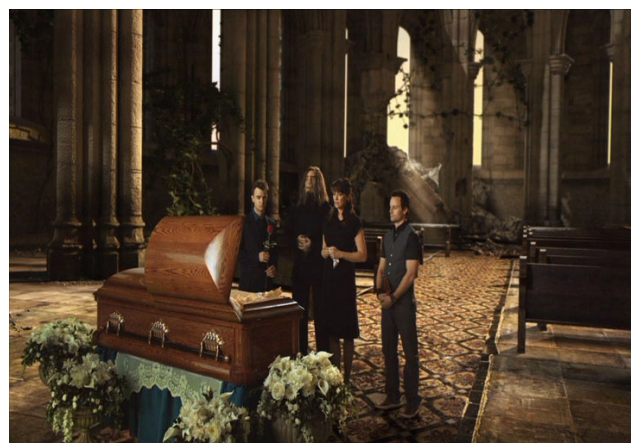
Series 2 takes up from there. The entire Sanctuary organization is under attack by the Cabal who have the help of a small group of genetically enhanced superhumans. They have obtained their genetic material from Ashley, the head of Sanctuary’s daughter. In further episodes the organization comes under attack from others as the powers of the abnormalities become wider known and more valuable. Some attacks come from within Sanctuary, a problem that the head, Dr Helen Magnus is only partly prepared to deal with.



With Sanctuary besieged on all sides there is still time for some episodes to show their basic work, the recovery of the abnormalities, and the associated problems. Some of the characters were left only lightly developed in Series 1 and these are now fleshed out more. There is no danger of the series becoming an SF soap opera, however, with dangerous abnormalities appearing in most episodes. There is still room in each episode for small flashes of humour. We meet some new characters during the series as well. Not all necessarily share the Sanctuary ideal.

If anything the CGI, a major part of the series, is better than before. Some 13,000 CG shots were used in this series and they have done them so well it is hard to separate reality from CG. A useful Extras section shows how the shots are done and skilfully integrated. It is hard to see how such a series could be made any other way. Live action and sets would be just too expensive.

The worst part is now I have to wait for Series 3.

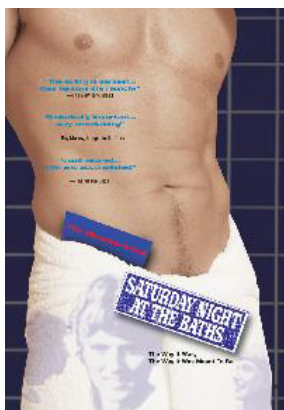


Saturday Night at the Baths Waterbearer Films R0 DVD

Saturday Night at the Baths, directed by David Buckley is a nostalgic journey back to 1975. Filmed in the Continental Bathhouse it shows firsthand gay life in the Seventies. The film is unusual in that all the characters in the film are real except for actors who play the lead male and female role. While it would be too easy to critique the film for its very basic production values, for its time it was a truly radical showing homosexuality in an honest and sympathetic light. It has immense trouble gaining distribution, the end result being that the director simply allowed it to sit unreleased for some thirty years save for initial theatre showings.

This release from Waterbearer films has been restored and footage cut from the cinema released (including a gay sex scene) put back into its rightful place. The restoration has been masterfully done offering a great picture and very clear sound.

The plot is simple but insightful. A young seemingly heterosexual man desperate for work takes a job as a pianist at a local gay bathhouse. At first he does not know how to deal with the wide sexuality of the new environment but along the way a friendship slowly develops between Michael, his girlfriend and Scotti, a young gay man. The story includes two beautifully filmed sex scenes which depict Michael's exploration of his sexuality first with his girlfriend and later with Scotti. The process by which Michael comes to an understanding of his own



fears and prejudices and later his sexuality are nicely presented and it is a poignant film which has a timeless message. In so many ways the film explores themes regarding sexuality which predate films such as Brokeback Mountain by thirty years. It was certainly a movie way ahead of its time.

The cinematography creates an amazing mood as it shows the baths in operation with drag shows, dancers, discos and more. It is so utterly realistic, not surprising really since while the plot is director driven, the baths and everything else is real.

At the same time the film becomes more significant when you realize that the film was made at the real Continental Baths and that it really does offer a snapshot of a unique time of history. The Continental Baths were central to the fight for gay rights. They were raided some hundred times and fought against restrictive laws and won changes which paved the way for the gay liberation movement. They also saw the launching of many careers ranging from Bette Midler to Barry Manilow.

The extras include a fascinating series of interviews including one with director David Buckley and with the founder of the Continental Baths, Steve Ostrow, who now lives in Australia. We get a fascinating insight into the lives of gay people during the Sixties and Seventies and hear Ostrow describe his continuing work with AIDS patients and with the mature age gay men's movement.

This is a very significant film within the history of the gay movement as well as a moving and accomplished work of gay cinema.

Web: <http://www.waterbearerfilms.com>

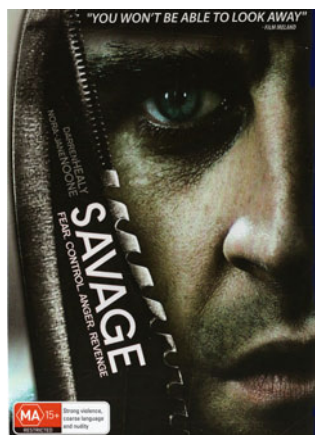


Savage Eagle Entertainment R4 DVD

When you talk of revenge films, Charles Bronson's classic *Death Wish* seems to be the one to come to mind. His character was a little two-dimensional, so the recent Australian film *Vigilante* was a pleasant improvement. It showed a little more character development in the lead character as he toughened himself up for the revenge showdown. Now the Irish have done it, and even better. This nasty revenge film highlights the psychological changes in the victim and the personality traits he must overcome before he can take his revenge.

Paul is a tabloid photographer, used to photographing the aftermath of the increasing violence on the city streets. He looks rather meek and girly with his out-of-date shoulder length hair and glasses, the sort of person who has "victim" stamped on his forehead. One night he is mugged and castrated in a particularly brutal attack and the shock to his self-esteem and masculinity is more than he can handle. He shaves off his long hair and takes up self-defence classes, but it will take more than a cosmetic makeover to recover his manhood. He takes up bodybuilding and steroids as well and in his new appearance he finds some sort of safety – he now looks more like the thugs who inhabit the streets at night. Under the effect of the steroids he is also becoming less sensitive to violence.

In a trial run of his new persona, however, he tries to face down a street thug but his confi-

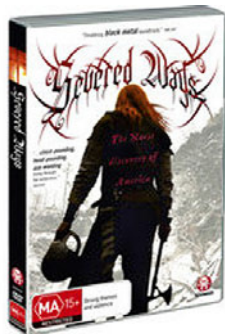


dence still isn't up to it. He buys a knife but isn't sure if he will be game to use it when the time comes, so he practices by killing and dismembering a sheep. Although Paul is still running in an emotional void and has deep psychological problems he feels he is now ready to make the change from helpless victim to vicious thug and track down and kill his assailants.

Darren Healy as Paul plays the challenging role with skill and sympathy. Although the blood and violence plays an important part in the film, director Brendan Muldowney has kept it in the context of the effects of the crime on the victim. In spite of Paul becoming a psychotic killer himself, as we follow his journey I couldn't help sympathising with him. He doesn't enjoy what he is doing but for his own self-respect he has to do it.



**Severed Ways:
The Norse Discovery of
America
Madman
R4 DVD**



This unusual independent film is the first film by director, writer and producer Tony Stone. He has apparently produced rock bands before, and this shows from the heavy metal backing track to the film.

The story is of Norse explorers Om and Volnard who have been left behind when their party was attacked by Skraelings (native tribes). They decide to make their way northwards in the hope of finding a Norse settlement. Although they can survive in the wilds they are unprepared to find a pair of Christian missionaries who have been shipwrecked and have built a small farm. Om in his traditional Norse savagery kills one monk but Volnard spares the other, who then follows them in their trek.

He should have killed the monk when he had the chance as the monk's attempts to turn Volnard to Christianity lead to a split between Volnard and Om. As well as the internal division they are also being followed by the local tribes who will probably kill them if given a chance.

Can they resolve their differences and cooperate to make it to safety? Divided they don't stand a chance.

I enjoyed most of the film, but there were a few parts where Stone's relative inexperience showed.



We did not need, for instance, the close-up shot of Om defecating in the woods. Nor does the soundtrack do much justice to the film, while those with a love of heavy metal may enjoy it, for many it will be utterly distracting.

Some scenes are protracted almost to the point of boredom and need some serious editing. To offset this, though, the scenery is beautifully filmed and the change of colours as winter approaches gives the film a sense of elapsed time as the travellers keep heading north.

Overall the film is a mixture of good and less good, but I enjoyed it. Tony Stone shows a lot of potential and it will be interesting to see his future work.



The Shadows
Victory of the People
Productions
Maxim Media
International
R0 DVD

I had mixed feelings about this film at first. The plot seemed fairly conventional, as were the characters. As the film progressed the interplay of the characters became more complex and the introduction of the ghostly elements introduced a new more frightening factor. Director Sabrina Mansfield has skilfully alternated between the personal conflicts and the deadly supernatural to keep the tension developing.

Five friends are shipwrecked on a lonely island in the Bahamas and take refuge in an abandoned lighthouse. Their boat was run into by another unidentified ship and each of them is lucky to have escaped with their life. As they recover in the lighthouse they become aware that there may be someone else on the island. The tension starts to build and their personal problems start to surface. A mysterious girl appears, who talks of pirates who will steal their souls.

Accidents start to happen. Then someone tries to break in and they find they are under siege, trapped in a scenario that doesn't appear to be quite real. The pirate is real, as real and lethal as a ghost can be. The true reality is something that they hadn't expected. Their battle for survival will need them all to overcome their personal differences and cooperate even if some are already verging on insanity.



It is a powerful film, well-constructed. We are given hints about what may be going on but never enough to see the ending coming at us. Meanwhile we must use our imagination to make sense of the confusing situation.

Web: <http://www.theshadowsfilm.com>

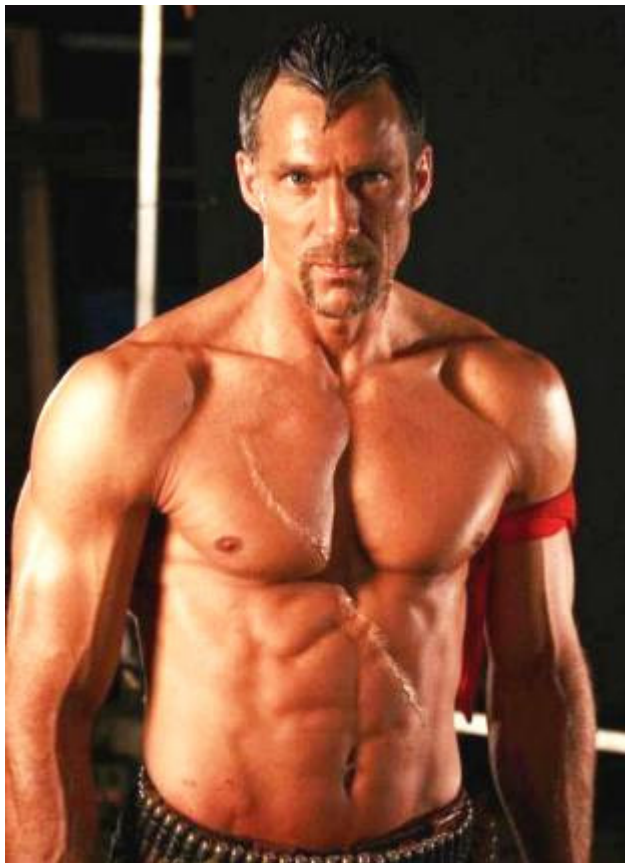
Tekken
Anchor Bay
R4 DVD

Tekken is an unapologetic take on the martial arts action thriller. Directed by Dwight. H. Little, the director of *Halloween 4: The Return of Michael Myers* it is based on the hugely popular computer game of the same name.



I generally don't think much of computer game adaptations but there are always some which surprise, such as *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, sadly this doesn't fall into that category.





The world has collapsed and is now divided post-apocalypse into various zones ruled over by military business conglomerates. The US is run by Tekken, Tekken uses shock troops to sustain control and operates an economy where only the rich succeed and the rest are outside the walls in various zones living in poverty and degradation.

One of the ways the poor are kept from focusing too much on their plight is through entertainment and the Iron Fist competition takes competitors from various world zones and plays them off against each other. In Tekken, an extra competitor is allowed, the people's favourite,



but he must complete his way past a range of deadly warriors.

Each of the competitors have their own style and persona. But do not expect any great character development, they are stereotypes taken to the nth degree and are simply used to show off various fighting styles. There are fighters with cyborg like implants, beautiful but lethal female ninja fighters, a brutal Russian soldier and so on.

The plot certainly doesn't have any great depth but serves its purpose. During an earlier tournament a beautiful competitor is raped and beaten by the son of the Tekken leader. He is so disgusted by his son's brutality that he arranges for her to be smuggled out of Tekken city and to be nursed back to health. It is from this union that Jin, The People's Choice is born.

By about 15 minutes in the story arc is obvious and the plot and characters really take second place to the fight set pieces. Jin will fight his way to the top, nearly losing, getting beaten to a pulp and then finally confronting his father. Very predictable and obvious.

Gamers will love the biff while others will have seen it all before. Even the addition of flash of exploitation cinema can't lift this film about the mediocre.

If you set your sights low and simply accept it as a mindless hour and a half of martial arts mayhem then you will enjoy it; but don't expect too much.

Triage **Beyond Home Ent** **R4 DVD**

Although this film dates back to 2001 it is just as timely as ever given the increasing number of wars around the world. It looks at the life of a war photographer and the way the constant violence and slaughter affect the photographer's humanity.



Can you spend your life photographing violence and not be affected by it yourself? Mark (Colin Farrell) seems to think he can handle it. He is currently in Kurdistan with his best friend, David (James Sives). Kurdistan was partitioned by the British and the Kurds are now fighting for independence from both Turkey and Saddam's Iraq. The photographers are at a remote mountain hospital run by a young Kurdish doctor and they see what it is to fight under guerrilla conditions. Triage is the medical practice of sorting patients according to how urgent their medical needs are. Minor cases can be left until last, major cases are treated more urgently. In the doctor's hospital, short on drugs and water and medical help, triage consists of deciding who will eventually get better by themselves, who needs attention that will keep them alive, and who cannot be helped at all. The ones beyond help are taken outside the hospital and the doctor shoots them to avoid the pain they will suffer otherwise. The doctor has become hardened to his role. The photographers feel they are just as hard and simply photograph what they see.



David wants to go home where his wife is due to have a baby. Mark keeps asking for just one more day in the hope that he can get that one great shot that will make his reputation. They photograph a Kurdish ambush then David starts for home, intending to walk the twenty miles to the nearest town. Reluctantly Mark goes with him.

We next see Mark back in the Kurdish hospital, badly injured. There is no sign of David. When he finally gets home he won't talk about what happened, just saying that he fell into a river, but a piece of shrapnel the doctors remove from his head suggests a different story. But what is it?

His wife finally calls on the help of her grandfather (Christopher Lee), a retired priest who describes himself as a "student of the human spirit". Gently he coaxes from Mark details of his war stories and their effect on him. It seems Mark still has compassion after all, and the camera lense cannot filter out the horror of all he has seen. As his relationship and trust in the old man grow, Mark finally starts to bring out the story of what happened in Kurdistan.

It is a powerful story but it would fall flat if it were not for the superb acting of Farrell and Christopher Lee, whose performance is the best I have seen from him.



Under the Mountain Sony R4 DVD

Black Sheep director Jonathan King adapts New Zealand novelist Maurice Gee's fantasy tale. The original novel was written in 1979 and while made into an eight part television series this is its first big screen debut. This strange and wonderful tale is a mixture of science fiction, fantasy and horror with a focus on the teen market. It is a joyful romp which pays homage to a range of horror classics from the work of H.P. Lovecraft, the cinematic series *Phantasm* and *Aliens* and B grade horror.

The plot is about two warring alien species. One has no compassion and simply wants to conquer the universe. This species subjugated huge Godzilla like creatures, the Gargantua, and used them to wander from world to world destroying them as they go. Only a few beings from the last conquered world and they banded together and locked the creatures and their alien masters under the seven great volcanos of New Zealand. However as centuries past the aliens escaped their prison and become the "Wilberforces", slimy shapeshifters who live in an old funeral home across the lake.



Now only one of the alien guardians is left, Mr. Jones (Sam Neil), master of fire. Teenage twins Rachel (Sophie McBride) and Theo (Tom Cameron) are staying with relatives after the death of their mother. They have psychic powers and a strong link exists between them. They sense something is wrong with the house across the lake and believe that the earthquakes shaking the region are premonitions of a coming disaster.

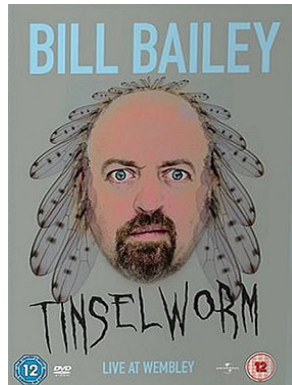
As Theo investigates the old house across the lake, which ends up being a mortuary filled with strange, slimy like creatures with lots of tentacles, the battle begins. Mr. Jones explains to them the innate power that some twins have and gives them two "fire stones" which they must use to destroy the aliens and their creatures.

This is a beautifully done horror-fantasy story with special effects by the Weta workshop and a great moody atmosphere. It is film that runs at a frantic pace and makes the most of its limited budget to create an unusual fantasy classic.



**Bill Bailey:
Tinselworm
Universal
R4 DVD**

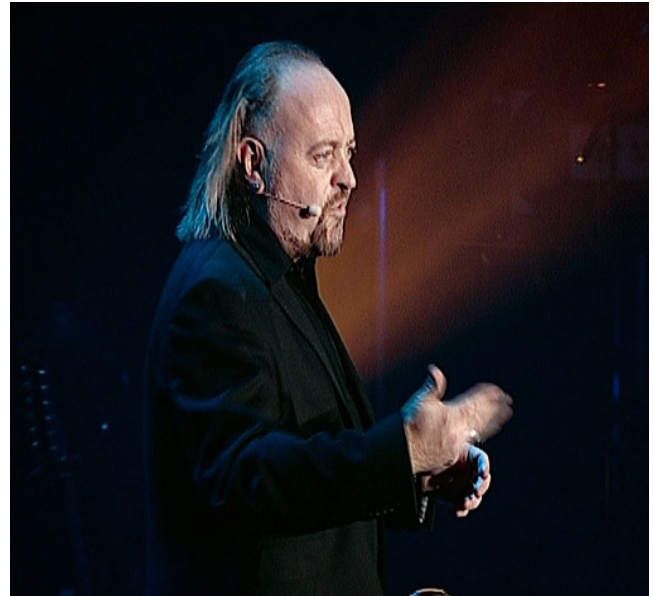
Bailey will be more familiar to most as Manny, Bernard Black's long-suffering assistant in the British sitcom *Black Books*. I was not aware that he was also a stand-up comedian but this DVD showcases his rather sophisticated style of humour.



The Tinselworm tour finished up in the giant Wembley Stadium where this DVD was made. It is a rambling, apparently unstructured show that seems to go wherever Bailey's mind takes it rather than follow a predetermined path. He punctuates his monologue with musical interludes (he is also a trained musician) and Duelling Banjos on guitar and sitar has to be heard to be believed. Even his music, though, has little unexpected twists.

At first I was a bit mystified at his style of humour. It didn't seem terribly funny, apparently lacking punchlines to many of his jokes. Then I realised that he was carefully and skilfully building a scenario with words and leaving the rest to the listener's imagination. It is a style that depends on a highly literate and imaginative audience since he plays with the English language like a musical instrument. At Wembley he had such an audience.

"2003 – Tourism is inexplicably on the increase in Baghdad. Strange Kevlar-suited tourists at the border posts – "Reason for visit?" "Regime change" "Occupation?" "Oh, I expect so""



CERN Large Hadron Collider "*The spectrum for success of this experiment ranges from "nothing will happen" to "a black hole will be created under Switzerland". That is quite a large margin of error*".

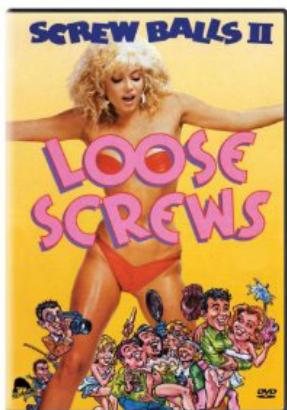
He does do a few one-liners, such as when discussing conspiracy theory: "*Gravity is a CIA plot to keep us on Earth*"

Once I warmed up to his style I thoroughly enjoyed the show. Bailey is a craftsman of the English language, his style of humour is subtle rather than in-your-face, and he doesn't find it necessary to punctuate his patter with swearing. The lack of swearing makes him a refreshing change from so many other comedians. He is just a genuinely funny man.



**Loose Screws:
Screwballs II
Severin Films
R1 DVD**

Roger Corman's 1985 B-grade classic has now been cleaned up and re-released on DVD. Severin has done a great job on the transfer and it probably looks better than it did when it was first re-released on video.



It's typical American 80's teen humour, and being a Roger Corman production it is both technically good and highly suggestive. It is full of the expected sexual innuendo, bad sex-based puns, and carefully-contrived sexually suggestive names (Hugh G. Rection??? Just so you know what to expect).

It has absolutely no subtlety at all and is simply designed to show lots of attractive females wearing as little as possible and to give as many sex-based jokes as the writers could fit into the script. Politically correct? Definitely not, but who cares?

I was a little surprised at just how far the film went for its day. Near nudity in mainstream film was still a touchy matter and the film certainly drew the censor's attention in more than one country. This version is the original, completely



uncensored. Despite its age it seems to have more skin than later similar films like American Pie.

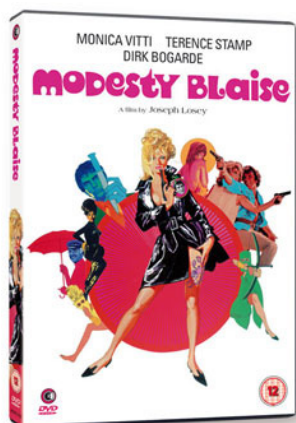
Were we more broadminded in those days or were we more prepared to accept the film for what it was – just a raunchy bit of comedy?

I am not a great fan of American humour, but I have to confess I enjoyed the film when it first came out and I enjoyed the rerelease just as much. It is not mentally taxing – minimal plot, no character development and few if any redeeming social values, but it is simply great fun. Get your friends, grab a few beers and enjoy it once again.



Modesty Blaise Second Sight R2 DVD

Modesty Blaise is a British comic strip featuring a fictional character of the same name. The world's deadliest spy was created by Peter O'Donnell (writer) and Jim Holdaway (artist) in 1963.



The comic strip documents the madcap adventures of Modesty Blaise as she double crosses everyone she meets, has wild affairs and escapes from hair-raising situations through the use of the most outlandish James Bond like weapons. The character has spawned some thirteen novels and three film adaptations of which the first is the most memorable.

The film was directed by was directed by Joseph Losey with a true psychedelic flair with a soundtrack to match. It combines a comedic send-up of the seriousness of the James Bond spy genre mixed with a high sense of camp and a dose of female empowerment. The film even includes a couple of musical numbers and the finale certainly has to be seen to be believed.

Monica Vitti brings a truly euro-spy feel to the character of Blaise and Terence Stamp as Willie Garvin works well as her sidekick. Dirk Bogarde as the epicene villain is truly amazing,



surrounded by lots of half-naked men and the domineering Mrs. Fothergill.

Modesty Blaise has a criminal past but since British Intelligence is having no success running its spy department it enlists her services. Working again with William Garvin, knife thrower and master of disguise she has to help the UK government get a large supply of diamonds to a Middle Eastern sheik to bring about "regime change".

Along the way she must battle against double crosses from the British government, Gabriel, an arch villain, his sadistic female friend who tortures and kills for pleasure and a diverse range of strange and unusual characters. This is Modesty Blaise however and her goals are not quite as honourable as it seems and it just may be that she will end up with the loot through a combination of skill and female wiles!

Modesty Blaise is a superb and marvellous romp; it is filled with psychedelic colours, outré outfits, witty dialogue and campy jokes. It takes the spy genre and creates one of the more memorable cult classics of the Sixties. The texture of the film is decidedly Sixties with the sets are so avant-garde that at times you have to look twice to assure yourself you have seen what you think you have seen.

This release from Second Sight is of superb quality and offers the very best in terms of visual clarity and audio (Dolby Digital 2.0)



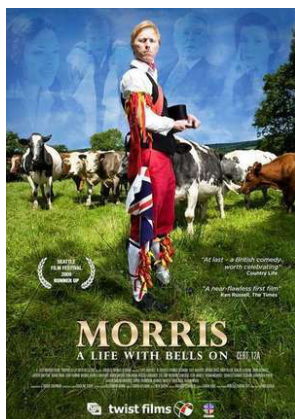
Morris – A Life With Bells On
Antidote films
R4 DVD

Oh dear ! I have always rated English Morris dancing on the same level as linedancing, air guitar and dwarf hurling, but nothing deserves the treatment this mockumentary gives the traditional English folk dance. Its humour is subtle but vicious as it lampoons the dance, the people and the traditions.

It follows the career of Derecq Twist of the Millsham Morris men. Derecq is a revolutionary – he wants to introduce some modern moves into the dance. Against him is the Morris Circle, the governing body of the dance, who profess to embrace change but will fight tooth and nail to preserve the status quo.

First, though, we learn about the dance itself. Many people think it's "an innocent pastime involving hanky-waving bearded men" but as Derecq explains "It's dangerous – it's a contact sport....You need to have reflexes like lightning. You need to have a pain threshold that's higher ...than an average folk dancer's".

There is a snobbishness in the dance clubs. You don't just join a club, you must be invited. "It's not just a case of hanging around a pub carpark until somebody says "Ere, mate. Fancy a dance?"



Derecq's father was a Morris man so it was assumed he would follow the traditions. The Morris Circle knew of his unsettling revolutionary ideas but took no action until he proposed to put on an exhibition of "Extreme Morris" at a local fair. The Circle then Rusticated him, the ultimate blow for a Morris man. He was expelled from all Morris clubs and Millsham club was no longer allowed to dance.

Devastated, Derecq moved to California where he found a Morris group who were prepared to embrace new moves. Their version of Morris, in fact, looked nothing like the traditional version. They hailed Derecq as a hero and he adapted to the American style. He even found his first girlfriend, but his heart was still in England and eventually he returned. Could he rebuild his Morris career? Could he force the traditionalists to recognise the need for change? Would he ever be allowed to perform the legendary Threeple Hammer Damson?

The film is full of sly digs at just about anything. While Morris dancing is the obvious target we also look at the American idea that anything is open to reinterpretation and commercialisation and to hell with tradition.

The West Country of Britain may be a beautiful place but its quaint people are ruthlessly parodied. "As my mother used to say *"It never took a faint heart to fuck a pig"*". Perhaps my favourite is the Morris dancers' attitude that line dancing is "The Devil's Dance".

The mockumentary has been compared to Spinal Tap but I think it's much better than that. It's subtle but funny, sly but brazen in places, and spares nobody.

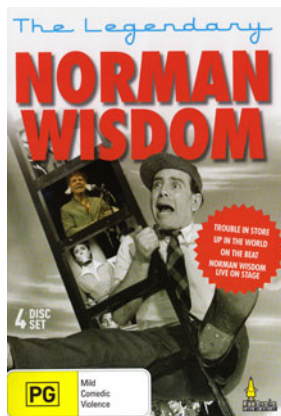


**The Legendary
Norman Wisdom
Umbrella
Entertainment
All Region**

Norman Wisdom started his comedy career in 1946 after leaving the army. As the straight man to a stage magician he began to refine the “uniform” he would wear through most of his career – floppy flat cap, suit a couple of sizes too small, and a generally shabby look. He was rather short and this helped to give him the downtrodden look that came to the fore in his films. He soon moved to TV shows and then to films.

His first film, *Trouble In Store* (1963) is included in this 4-DVD set. Although the acting is a little rough in places we can see Norman developing his film personality. Many of the characteristics of this film carried on through his other films – Norman as the downtrodden underling, the many short slapstick routines, deflating the pompous upper classes, a song or two (he was a pretty good singer), and the quiet understanding and kindness of the other workers to Norman as one of their own. And, of course, he always got the girl in the end. Even that strange English tradition of having the hero dress as a woman gets an airing.

It seems to have been the sheer simplicity of his character and the plots that made his films so popular. They owed a lot to George Formby and Charlie Chaplin and despite their rather repetitious nature the films kept the Rank organization



going for many years. We have two good examples in the set, *Up In The World* (1956) and *On The Beat* (1962). *Up In The World* is probably one of the better examples of his middle most successful period and *On The Beat* shows Norman at his best and just before his popularity began to wane. He eventually concentrated more on a cabaret act that he took worldwide, with a great deal of success.

The fourth DVD in the set, *Norman Wisdom Live On Stage*, shows that the public still remembered him fondly. The packed hall watched him doing his songs, slapstick routines, and generally clowning about as they were used to seeing him do. Although it was filmed in 2004 Norman's comedy routines look only a little dated and the show is still great fun to watch.

Norman faded away gently, doing TV appearances and special shows occasionally. There was a small revival in his career when DVDs of some of his films were released. The old appeal still seemed to be there, even to a new generation of viewers. He was honoured on *This Is Your Life* twice and in 2000 received a Knighthood.

His films may not be as popular now as they once were but they marked a transition as Britain moved from pre-War dramas to the more sophisticated comedy that they now do so well. It is easy to see how Wisdom's films led Rank into shows like the *Carry On* series. This DVD set is a fitting example of the work of a great comedian.



**Casus Kiran
(Spy Smasher)
Turkey, 1968
Onar Films**

This is another in the wonderful series of films unearthed and restored by Onar. Turkish films of this genre featured simple (often unbelievable) plots, loads of action, a larger than life hero and an attractive girlfriend in tight brief clothing. They were cheap entertainment for the Turkish cinemas and they were FUN. Spy Smasher is no exception.



The bad guy The Mask is instigating acts of terror all over the Mediterranean as part of his plan to destabilise the world. He has kidnapped the Professor to get his formula (for what? We are never told). Spy Smasher and his girlfriend must rescue him by beating up the evil henchmen, who all wear black hats for easy identification in a fight. The Mask gets tired of having his plans for world domination spoiled by Spy Smasher so he kidnaps the daughter of the only detective on the Istanbul Police who seems to know who Spy Smasher is. The daughter, of course, is Spy Smasher's girlfriend. There is much beating up of bad guys, the compulsory car chase and boat chase, incredible leaps of intuition about where the baddies are currently hiding and all the other features that made these films so enjoyable.

Spy Smasher looks suspiciously like Iron Claw



from an earlier Onar film, right down to the mask and cape and bad motorbike riding. Why did Turkish heroes dress up as Batman? The girl's clothing is even briefer than usual, but she is thoroughly disguised by a large pair of sunglasses. The boat chase I am sure is taken directly from Iron Claw the Pirate. Much of the background music is pirated from western pop charts of the period, like the Ventures tune that accompanies the chase scenes. The shooting hasn't improved either – the bad guys still can't shoot Spy Smasher at a distance of a few metres. The overall feel of the film isn't improved by some of the corniest dialogue I have seen – OK, maybe it just lost a lot in the translation.

Spy Smasher is a hilarious romp through the Eurospy genre. Don't expect quality acting or great characterisation – just a lot of fun. You even get an A4 copy of the film poster to show your friends where your tastes lie.

Web: <http://www.onarfilms.com>



Give 'Em Hell Malone Sony Pictures R4 DVD

This strange film directed by Russell Mulcahy is an almost cartoon-like detective show, but it falls flat with some odd and unprofessional lapses in the period it is set in. It seems to be a tribute to those early private eye shows and borrows from many of them.

Malone is a private detective. He is hired to recover a mysterious suitcase that turns out to be full of apparent rubbish, but a lot of people are out to kill him to recover the contents of the case. It seems to have some connection with his dead family, killed by gangsters many years ago. It's up to him to find this connection while staying alive.

It is a very violent film and Mulcahy glories in the blood, the closeup gunshot impacts and the shots of people being set on fire. The characters are all caricatures from the femme fatale to the evil businessman. "You can't buy respectability but you can kill everyone who knows you've been bad."

In a film of ordinary performances, Ving Rhames stands out as the killer who is developing a conscience and Eileen Ryan as Malone's alcoholic, long suffering mother to whom Malone returns when he is in trouble. As, for instance, when he is lying shot and bleeding on

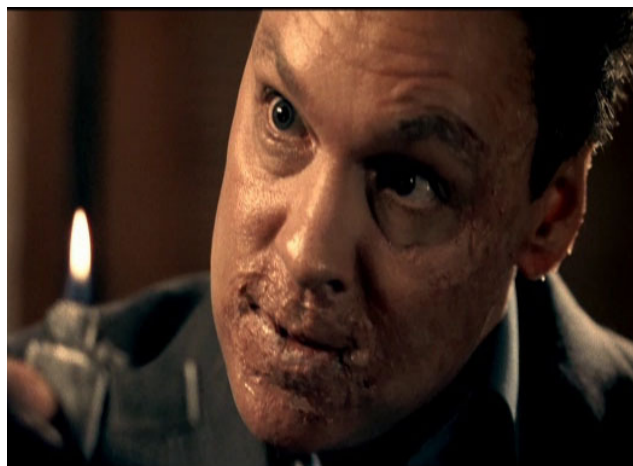


the floor of her retirement home room. "I guess I should be grateful. If it wasn't for these wonderful shootouts I wouldn't get to see you at all". .

The strange part about the film is it is a detective show set apparently in the forties, yet showing modern cars and container trains. That is incongruous and annoying. And why does his car have no numberplates? That should attract the attention of the police, surely?

Overall I'm not too sure whether the film is tongue-in-cheek or just clumsy. Still, if you like your films with a lot of unsanitised violence you will enjoy this one.

There is much debate about this film, perhaps it would be best to see it in terms of the modern diesel punk movement. More and more this movement has influenced film and is creating a new genre where retro elements are mixed with more modernist elements to create a strange "out of time" blend. Whether this is a successful approach is a matter for the viewer to decide...



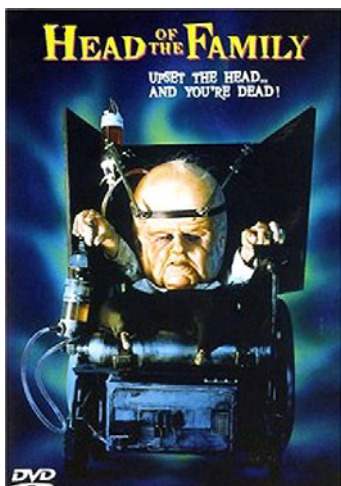
Head of The Family
Horror
 Blue Sky Video
 Beyond Home
 Entertainment
 R4 DVD

The secretive Stackpoole family is a bit unusual. The four of them are quadruplets but they have not received all the normal faculties.

Rather, they are shared between the family members. Otis is the dumb one but has super-human strength. Wheeler seems like he is retarded but has eyesight and hearing far above anyone else. Ernestina, the female, has the attribute of immense sex appeal and she seems able to control any man to do her bidding. They are all controlled by Myron, literally the head of the family, by telepathy. His gross misshapen head and stunted body hold a powerful, twisted intellect. "One mind controlling four separate bodies"

Myron is unhappy with his situation. He would like to keep his powerful mind but transfer it to a more human body. To this end the family is kidnapping motorists so Myron can experiment towards his goal. His experiments are gruesome and leave the victim with a nearly empty mind. These human shells are kept in captivity in the basement of the isolated family home.

Bogan, a storekeeper, is having trouble with Howie, the local drug dealer, hardcase and ex-



tortionist. Howie has made him an offer to be a "silent partner" in the store for only fifty percent of the takings. Bogan is in an awkward position – he is having an affair with Howie's wife. If this is discovered he will be killed. If he refuses the "partnership" offer he will be killed.

One night Bogan sees the Stackpooles at work kidnapping a passing motorist and realises this could be his way out. In exchange for his silence about their activities he gets Myron to agree to kill Howie. This works out well but he gets too greedy when he decides to blackmail them as well. Can his redneck cunning beat Myron's huge brain and his wish for a normal body? Of course not, but when the Stackpoole house catches fire who will survive?

The film is a nicely done piece of light horror, especially the makeup on Myron's head. In the battle between rednecks and freaks there is no real opportunity for great acting but the tight, twisting plot is good and carries the momentum of the film right up to the last seconds.



Il Gatto Dal Viso D'Uomo
Oh My Gore
R2 DVD

Il Gatto Dal Viso D'Uomo is a dark and haunting French Giallo film, which takes obvious inspiration from Italian Giallo masters such as Dario Argento. It has French audio with removable English and Italian subtitles. The film is marked by a dreamlike cinematography coupled with a truly creative soundtrack. The soundscape of the film varies from traditional Italian Giallo inspired electronica (aka similar to Goblin), to classical strands and opera, it is intertwined with each scene in such a way that it creates a very atmospheric mood.

This is a short film (45 minutes), directed by Marc Dray, yet successfully captures the madness of a killer. The film should not be followed lineally but enjoyed as a textured nightmare with some marvellous set pieces and lots of mood. A young hitch-hiker waits on the edge of a dark road. She is picked up by a man who seems preoccupied and a little menacing. Little does she know the truth about how she will confront; part nightmare, part hallucination, this is a journey into madness and violence.

I found this a real fresh of breath air in the current horror market. There is not a lot of Giallo currently in release and this is well worth seeing.

On My Gore has released this as a limited edition of 1000 copies in a rather nice looking digi-pack with some great extras.

Web: <http://www.ohmygore.com>



Kick Ass (2010)
Lionsgate
R1 DVD

Kick Ass is one of the strangest and most truly outrageous superhero films I have ever seen. Combining a story of teen angst, comic book heroes and the very dark world of crime it moves between comedy, crime and horror in a way that its it very hard to pigeonhole. This is certainly a cross genre cult film and will make its home among classic cult films.

Director Matthew Vaughn and screenwriter Jane Goldman have adapted the comic-book series by Mark Millar and John Romita Jr to create something which is quite unique. It is unashamedly violent, gore ridden and confronting yet also amusing and at times anarchic and surreal.

Kick-Ass is a sad teen boy whose life is not what he wants. Dave likes comic books, has nerdy friends and has no success with girls. He decides his best chance is to turn himself into a superhero and hence orders a scuba suit via mail order. His first attempt at super-hero work does not go especially well, he is beaten, stabbed and hit by a car ! After this he takes to training, which seems more like fantasizing, and his dream doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

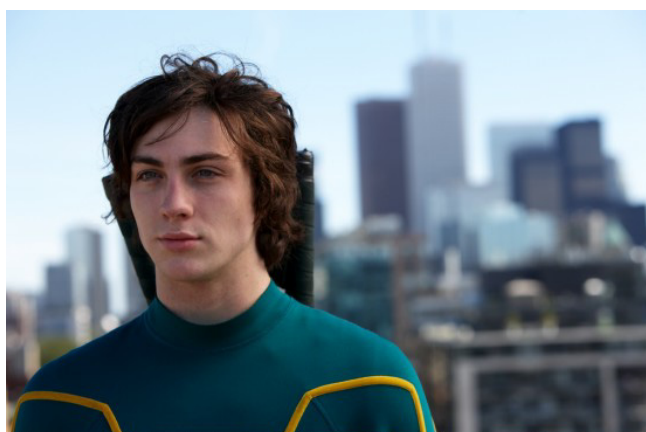
This all changes when one day he decides to confront a drug dealer who is annoying a girl he likes. Just as he is about to get his ass kicked once again after tasing the guy in the head Hit Girl appears.





She looks about eleven, has purple hair and lots of weapons. To the tune of Banana Splits she slaughters the lot of them ! She is a superhero who has no qualms about killing the enemy. We soon learn she is the kid of Big Daddy (Nicolas Cage), a batman like superhero who has trained her since birth. Earlier scenes as he shoots her in the chest while she is wearing a bullet proof vest are decidedly bizarre. Big Daddy was driven off the police force and into prison on a trumped up drug charge and is now a vigilante working to destroy the organized crime gang behind his demise.

The story gets weirder as weirder as Big Daddy and Hit Girl work their way through the organized crime gang killing with abandon. As the violence increases you get the feeling you are in some sort of surreal nightmare. It is certainly a controversial portrayal of childhood to have a young girl working as a trained assassin. Many have taken terrible offence to this portrayal of child violence (even though comic book in style) and all sorts of "family values" campaigners have crawled out of their holes demanding it be damned.



When the crime lord starts losing more and more of his business and his men, his dorky son gets in on the game appearing as a new superhero Red Mist. Of course this is all a front to entrap those who are after his father and the showdown is bloody and confronting. Big Daddy and Kick-Ass are beaten to a pulp and finally Big Daddy burnt to a cinder, all steamed live to the internet like a snuff feed, Hit Girl appears in the nick of time to save Kick Ass but cannot save Big Daddy. It is now up to Kick Ass and Hit Girl to finish the job !

This is a movie which will thrill and confound in equal amounts. At times the teen humour seems just too dorky to be entertaining and yet at others the sheer brutality of the violence makes you turn away. The fact that much of the violence is committed by an eleven year old girl and would be more at home in Kill Bill or Battle Royale makes it even disconcerting.

Kick Ass is so cross genre that you find it hard to know what you are watching. At times I think it gets somewhat lost and doesn't really know what it is. Don't get me wrong I enjoyed it; I am just not sure exactly what I was watching. For many cinema goers it is important to be able to develop a certain emotional affinity for a film, to feel they know where it is at and it is hard to do this with Kick Ass since it swerves through all manner of genres and never seems to settle done in one mood. You can be laughing one minute and then be confronting with a scene of extreme dark violence the next, you have a series of teen coming age of scenes interposed with comic book comedy. It is hard to decipher Kick Ass, however, it is fair to say as a work of cinema, it is a very wild ride.

Psychoville
British Comedy
Drama
BBC / Roadshow
Entertainment
R4 DVD

This dark comedy follows in the tradition of Snuffbox with just a bit of Little Britain thrown in. There is a new British comedy genre that has diverged from the Monty Python style of humour and the TV sitcom and started to explore new areas and taboo subjects. Psychoville is a good example with its demented characters, lampooning of mental illness and even a passing swipe at dwarves.

The characters are all initially disconnected, their only common thread being that they have received a letter with a key enclosed, and a message "I know what you did:" The first two episodes introduce and explore the characters themselves without developing the mystery very much.

There is Joy the midwife, who has suffered a mental breakdown and been given a doll as part of her therapy. She now regards the doll as her child. When her husband rips the doll's head off she kidnaps a nurse and transfuses her blood into the doll to revive it.

David is an expert on serial killers who used to run murder parties, which he called "my murders". His ever-supportive but domineering mum Maureen believes he is talking about real serial killing so she has taken up doing a few killings of her own.



Mr Jelly is an embittered clown with a hook where his right hand used to be. His career has gone downhill a bit since he lost his hand. His arch-enemy is Mr Jolly. He envies Mr Jolly's success as a clown but they have both received The Letter and must join forces.

Oscar Lomax is a recluse in his decaying mansion. He hires young people to read his mail to him, but so far he hasn't received the letter from NASA that he is waiting for.

There are more characters and subplots and the telekinetic dwarf seems quite normal in comparison to some of them.

And who is the Mysterious Masked Stranger ?

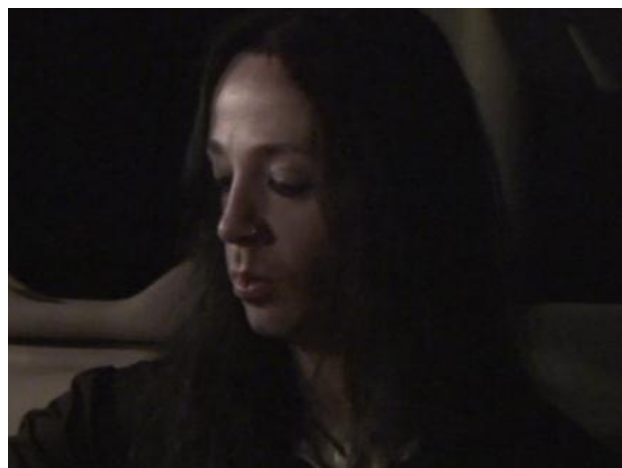
What is the key that links all these characters? There are seven parts to the series so we have a while to wait before we find out. Meanwhile it is rapidly becoming a cult. The show completely ignores political correctness. Indeed, like Little Britain, the writers Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton seem to enjoy making it as incorrect as possible. The plot has more twists and turns than a pair of mating snakes and so far there is no indication of where it is going. It's



Sell It to the Devil Tastyland Pictures R1 DVD

Sell it to the Devil, directed by David Gaz, sets out with a simple premise. The director searches through the many denizens of Hollywood for someone who is so eager for fame, fortune and the good things in life that they will undertake an ancient rite of Medieval sorcery and sell their soul to the devil. Gaz finds his star in Kai Blackwood, a goth heavy metal singer who is an aspiring rockstar but just not close enough to grasping fame that he will take the risk.

Now how serious we are to take all this is a matter of debate. Some Christians and theistic Satanists certainly believe in a personal devil and assert it is possible to make a pact with him. As the rather informed employee at the Philosophical Research Foundation notes, whether you are a Christian or Satanist, to attempt to give your life over to someone else displays a rather marked desire to get rid of personal responsibility. Another angle popular with Jungians and members of Anton LaVey's Church of Satan is that Satan is simply a psychological archetype or image of taboo and hence a pact is more symbolic than actual. It is a process of attempting to awaken a dark side of the self rather than evoke a non-existent external deity. It is strange that statistically more Americans believe in Satan than in god, it seems that the image of the devil still has the ability to evoke fear even when science has dis-



proved the existence of the old man in the sky with a beard.

To sell his soul Kai meets all sorts of strange people including receiving dire warnings from Christian priests and evangelists. It is decided he must follow the instructions of "Le Grand Grimoire" so he begins his path to the pact. Guided by the eccentric Jymie Darling, who seems to enjoy her time in the spotlight just a little too much, he begins to collect the specialized items the rite requires. It is a far cry from the long and harsh journey the Medieval sorcerer would have had to make, Fedex can deliver many of the supplies and the would-be spellcaster can visit any number of stores to pick up everything from graveyard dust to that rare and unique incense or scent in neatly marked packages.

As the day draws close Kai has the jitters but continues on his path. Bluntly it seems to me that his guide Jymie is more on edge than he is and this is certainly proven to be true when the rite is finally undertaken. They begin their sorcery at an isolated location with invocations, a pact written in blood and lots of candles and fanfair. But as things progress dear old pagan Jymie takes a "high and mighty" stand against what is occurring frightened that the candles will not hold the demon in place and that she must preserve Kai's "higher self". Never mind that this is Kai's decisions and his ritual; I always love the pomposity of self-appointed authority. The rite ends in an anti-climax and so does the film.

A strange and intriguing documentary it is an interesting journey into the world of the dark arts, how serious you should take it all is up to you.



**42nd Street Pete's
Kink-O-Rama
Collection
After Hours Cinema
All Region DVD**



Leave it to 42nd Street Pete, only he seems able to find the rarest and most obscure adult films, clips and loops from the distant past and make them available for our viewing pleasure. From the most perverse to the most sublime, from porn stars to lesser knowns who simply strutted their stuff for a second then vanished into obscurity, they are all revealed in naked glory.

"They were young and beautiful - with a yen for the unusual."

"Kink-O-Rama" is a feature from director Lasse Braun, who basically just edited together some existing 8mm loops, dubbed in dialogue, and shot minimal new footage to create what could be very loosely defined as a storyline. The plot concerns a frigid young woman (Cindy Reems) who seeks advice from a psychiatrist (Gloria Leonard), as she reflects on her problems, flashbacks vividly replay her experiences and those of others.

As if this isn't enough, Pete then rounds up fifteen of the most debauched loops you will ever see. Each loop is lovingly described in a comprehensive full colour insert booklet.

They begin with Satan's Girl and Sweet Dreams and continue on through every type of domination, bondage and well, you'll find out when you get the DVD !

These are certainly unusual and hard to find loops and it is great to have them all in our collection. All in all there is 3 ¼ hours of filth in this collection !!

Web: <http://www.alternativecinema.com>

**Girls, Girls, Girls of the
1970s
Secret Key Motion Pictures
All Region NTSC**



There seems to be a revival in interest in these early erotica films. They occupy an important place in film history. For the first time more explicit full length films were being shown in U.S. cinemas rather than quickie one-reelers meant for showing in your mate's garage one Saturday afternoon. This collection is representative of those early "grindhouse" films. One film, The Sexpert (1972) is little more than a set of one-reelers tied together with a minimal plot and dreadful acting, but then acting wasn't why you went to see these films.

Even in the tits-n-bum category they are tame by today's standards but they would have been regarded as fairly raunchy in their day. Although you could show breasts (and were expected to) a glimpse of p***s (we don't want to offend our more delicate readers, do we?) was definitely out.

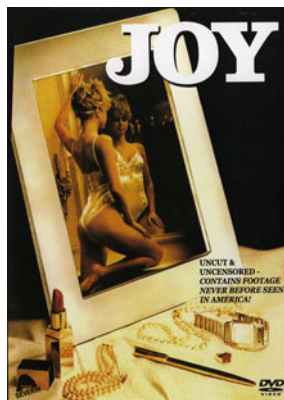
The films in the collection are The Sexpert, Picture Book of Love, Ski Party, Leid in Hawaii, and School of Love. They lack the sophistication of the European equivalents of the time but they were about ten years behind the Germans or French in producing erotic films. For a home-grown very low budget product they weren't too bad. They served the market for many years and gradually led to the higher quality feature erotic films that are still classics today.

The technical quality of the early films was rather poor so don't expect great film-to-DVD transfers, in spite of the "Enhanced Edition" on each title. In some ways the poor transfers add to the ambience of the films, making them look a little more sleazy if that's possible. So put on your dirty raincoat, hit the "Grindhouse" button, sit back and relive your 70s.

Web: <http://www.alternativecinema.com>

**Joy
Severin
R1 DVD**

*French, English
subtitles*



Although this film is hailed as a great erotic classic on the level of *Emmanuelle*, I find it hard to agree. The film has a minimal plot and a certain amount of style but little substance. It lacks *Emmanuelle*'s strong underlying themes of submission leading to domination, or for that matter, any other worthy theme..

To put the plot simply, Joy is an airhead who enjoys sex with anyone. She joins up with Marc, a fifty-something man about town who seems to enjoy watching Joy having sex with other men. Joy leaves him and goes to the U.S. That's about it – hardly a plot to get excited about. Claudia Udy who plays Joy has an out of balance breast enhancement job that is quite distracting in what are otherwise beautifully filmed nude shots. Severin's excellent cleanup of the original copy enhances the flaws.

The performances are ritualised and stylised in the French manner with little actual enthusiasm shown – it's as if the French think it's OK to show sex scenes provided no one is enjoying themselves. There are also some quite silly scenes, particularly the one where Joy is joining in an orgy on a waterbed while wearing stiletto heels. It seemed sure to have a wet finish, but I was disappointed.

I couldn't really get enthusiastic about Joy. It could have been so much more had it just been



left as a straightforward skin flick, but by trying to make some sort of work of art of it the director missed his target. At least Severin has managed to track down the bits that were edited out and restored the film to its original length.

Joy and Joan

This follow-up to Joy is not as shallow but is far more surreal. Joy is to marry Bruce, a sixtyish very rich man. He lives in Thailand. His idea of an engagement party is to drug Joy and she is had by every man at the party. All the while a fat lady is screeching opera and a couple of ballet dancers are prancing around. For some reason there is also a caged tiger whose purpose is never clear.



Bruce tells her the next morning that since she is a woman who enjoys pleasure the greatest gift he can give her is pleasure. Bruce is a man with strange ideas. Joy also has her own personal slave, a girl named Millarca.

This time Joy wants out and tries to contact her old boyfriend in Paris, but Marc is unable to be contacted. With Millarca's help she escapes and heads into town. Escaping Bruce, she falls in with a tour guide and they become friends, although the expected lesbian scene doesn't materialise. Not yet, anyway, but you know it's coming.

To get away from Bruce the two girls go to the Philippines but one of his servants tracks them





down. They are kidnapped and deposited at a pool orgy. Joy escapes with help from her girlfriend and the two settle in Paris. In a threesome with Marc. And the baby.

Actress Brigitte Lahaie now plays the role of Joy. On the cover slick she is billed as "Joy returns with the perfect pair" but this may just mean her co-star. Unfortunately changing the lead actress and setting the story in beautiful scenery still can't make a turkey fly, and despite the slightly better plot this one is still a turkey. Erotic? Not really although there are some good bits. Once again the director misses the target and produces a film that is not porn and not erotic enough, but sits uncomfortably in the middle.

**Skin In The 70's
Historic erotica
Secret Key Motion
Pictures
All Region DVD**

In the early 1970s the U.S. erotic movie was maturing. The quickie grindhouse compilations and one-reelers were giving way to better quality productions. Plots, film techniques and even acting skills were becoming more important. The sex content was still there but it was now integrated into the plot. It was also fairly innocent by today's standards. This compilation features four films on two DVDs from the period 1972 to 1975.

Blue Summer (1973) is the traditional college-students-on-a-road trip format with a few attractive girls and a couple of geeky guys. Now it would be called a "coming of age" movie.



Sometime Sweet Susan (1975) is an intense psychological drama with reduced sex content since this version was cut for an R rating from the original hardcore version. Susan (Shawn Harris) is in a mental institution where it soon becomes obvious to her psychologist (Harry Reems) that she has a second personality that comes to the fore in times of stress. Her alter ego is brash, slutty and everything that Susan isn't.

Summer School Teachers (1974) is another standard plotline regarding three female teachers who are hired to teach school classes for the usual bunch of oversexed retards (most of whom look a bit old to be students). It's rather silly and unbelievable but well filmed and the women are attractive.

Teenage Divorce (1972) is a decidedly poor film where a group of young divorced people (and they are definitely not teenagers) join together in a small commune. The film achieved a certain cult status, not so much for its acting or plot as for the appearance of a quietly gay bonsai-loving George Takei, soon to reappear in Star Trek as Mr Sulu.

Skin In The 70s is an interesting range of films, covering as it does a range of the emerging themes that were later developed into major porn films by the U.S. industry.

The quality of the original films was variable so the quality of the transfers is patchy, but overall Secret Key has done a good job to reproduce these old films on DVD. One feature I liked was a small but detailed foldout brochure written by "The After Hours Collector" giving information on the films and their history.

Web: <http://www.alternativecinema.com>

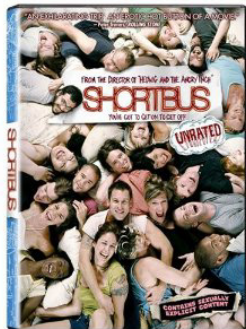


Shortbus
Velocity / Thinkfilm
R1 DVD

Shortbus is an example of why censorship does not work. It is a film which celebrates the power of sex and love to heal the fractured lives of a range of couples post 9/11. It is sexually explicit with real sex throughout the film yet it is hard to see it as pornography. In my mind there is nothing wrong with porn, but pornography is sex depicted for the sex of arousal alone with little story or context. *Shortbus* is a profound exploration of the nature of sex to free people from the narrow shackles of their lives. Sadly *Shortbus* was banned on release in Australia and only allowed distribution with cuts and the replacement of sexually explicit scenes with other footage. I would suggest you get hold of an import copy from the U.S and see the film as the director intended.

Shortbus opens with some wild scenes, we see New York in an artistic even impressionist style and the camera travels over the red scar which is Ground Zero and we get a context for the film. Soon we are into the sex with a dominatrix working her trade, a young man sucking his own dick and a couple making love; they all climax together (though in different locations) and the story begins.

The story focuses on a salon called *Shortbus* where every sexual taste is catered to and exploration of all forms of eroticism (albeit legal and safe) are encouraged. The various individuals and couples whose lives intertwine at *Shortbus* include the sex therapist (who sees herself as a relationship counsellor) who cannot have



an orgasm and her young husband Rob who slips out to be whipped every so often. Jamie and James, a gay couple who are plagued with relationship issues, because James cannot let himself go and really experience love. There is Severin a strict and vicious dominatrix who really just wants some affection and love and many others and Ceth, a beautiful young man exploring his sexuality.

Shortbus explores the way in which their fractured and difficult lives are helped and hindered by sex. In the end, however, it is the openness to new sexual freedom which truly helps them. If there is a message to *Shortbus* it is the ultimate power of the orgasm and a celebration of pansexuality. There are some truly memorable and funny moments like the threesome of Jamie, James and Ceth where Jamie sings the Star Spangled Banner while giving James a rim job!

Director, John Cameron Mitchell explores all manner of sexuality and refuses to conform to traditional norms. *Shortbus* has young, old, fat, gay, straight, bi, BDSM – everybody pushing boundaries to find who they really are. In a way this harkens back to the radicalism of the Seventies and the pagan revival and it is not surprising to find Mitchell is involved with the radical faery movement.

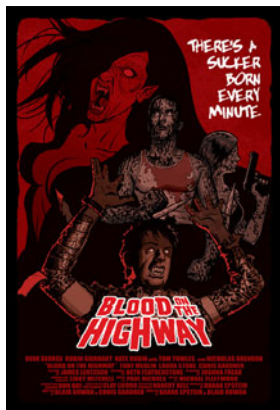
There are also many moving moments including the suicide attempt by James and when the retired mayor of New York discusses how he tried to fight AIDS while living in the closet.

Musically, *Shortbus* is an achievement too with lots of jazz and cabaret and a great finale number in Everybody Gets It In the End. *Shortbus* is a celebration of sexuality, lust and love and has both an innocence and honesty not found in many films with such explicit content. It is must see cinema.



Blood On The Highway R1 DVD

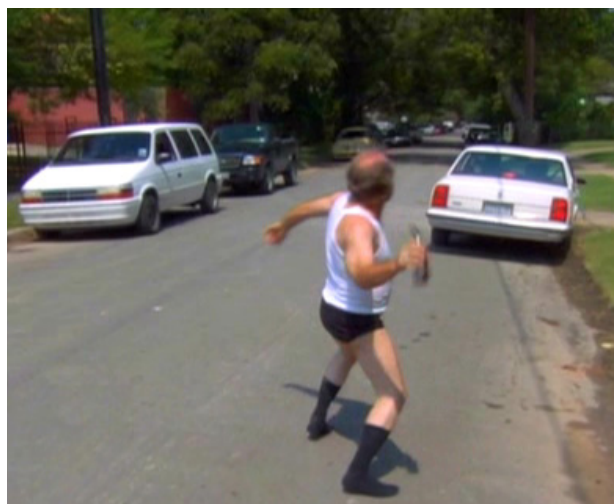
I have seen enough conventional vampire movies to make the genre seem a bit tired but this one soon got my interest. Everything is turned upside down in directors' Blair Owens' and Barak Epstein's crude and tasteless indie vampire story.



There is the compulsory trio of twentyish kids off on a road trip to a rock concert - the whiney Sam, who has the money, Carrie who is nominally Sam's boyfriend but uses him for money and an outlet for her constant PMT-ish tantrums, and Bone, Sam's not-really friend who is the tough guy but seems a bit lacking in humanity.

They take the wrong turn (naturally) and end up in the little town of Fate. The population here is mostly vampires. They were infected somehow when a new local superstore opened. The townsfolk have got used to their new condition and exist quite happily, only becoming violent when fresh blood comes into town. Such as Sam, Carrie and Bone, who arrive conveniently after nightfall when the town is at its busiest. Sam manages to get repeatedly bitten and will, therefore, turn into a vampire after a lot of whining.

They are saved by Byron, a trigger-happy deranged survivalist, and accept the hospitality of his house just outside town where he has set up an "independent nation" called House-achussetts. Its population consists of Byron, his



sex-mad trailer trash wife, and an annoying boastful cowardly young guy called Roy. Roy apparently has an inverted penis and becomes aggressive when his deformity is mentioned. It is hard to imagine a less sympathetic bunch of characters and I was starting by now to swing over to the vampires' side.

The vampires decide to attack the house since they are sick of Byron reducing the town's population. I liked the scene where a small group of younger vampires is standing on the front lawn sharing a joint and discussing rationally the best way to get in. Sam is still turning into a vampire and is starting to pose a danger to all of them. Byron is in favour of beheading him – slowly. Things look grim for the little group.

"We're fucked like an autistic eight-year-old at a NAMBLA meeting".

The film takes almost every cliché in the vampire genre and lampoons it. Intelligent, sensitive vampires? Antisocial rednecks who kill them? That's my type of vampire movie.

Web: <http://www.bloodonthehighway.com/>

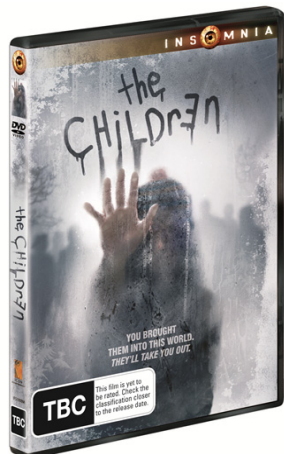


The Children
Insomnia Range
Icon Films
R4 DVD
Blu Ray (A,B & C)

Tom Shankland's British horror movie, *The Children* is a superb evocation of terror and suspense set within the world of family life. It is the sheer normality of the family world that Shankland's creates that makes the violence of the later sections of the film so powerful.

It's Christmas, the time for family and celebration. Elaine arrives at her sister's large country home with all the family. The kids all seem to be overflowing with fun except for teen Casey who seems annoyed by it all and spends her time sulking. Since everyone is carried away with seasonal celebrations no one really takes notice of Elaine's youngest becoming ill nor the fact that his illness seems to be having an influence on the other children.

At first the children all seem a little off-colour but then soon extends to aggressive mood swings, crying, yelling and screaming. Of course while this is disconcerting to the viewer it is hard to tell whether these symptoms are serious or just a mixture of over excitement. Slowly, however, things begin to become a bit more ominous. The children's behaviour begins to take on a spiteful and violent turn and you realize that some sort of virus is transforming the children one by one. Every time a child vomits it changes from a normal, if hyperactive kid, is a murderous monster with no control on its instincts.



The cinematography is quite super using very simple images to protect a sense of dread. The transformation of the children is simply marked by dark rings under their eyes and a behavioural change. Shankland is able to take all manner of everyday objects such as toys and dolls and turn them into something else altogether. While most of us see snow as a beautiful and evocative image of Christmas, here winter becomes a sign of evil and death, the whiteness of the snow seems to represent the pale face of the grim reaper and the wind heralds another killing.

The deliberate lack of detail in the story helps intensify the horror. What exactly is the nature of the contagion? Why does it only infect the young? The fact that these questions are not answered and we have only get hints which are dropped along the way adds to the suspense and terror.

Certainly the intensity of the violence will shock. Children and adults attacking each other is always sensitive in film and the ferocity of some the scenes certainly has the desired effect. However the first does not dwell unnecessarily on the violence and really uses it sporadically to tell the tale. Sure scalps are torn off and a pencil driven into an eye and so on but these are not indulgent.

An interesting theme is the psychological deception within the familial environment. Even when it is clear that something has changed their children into murderous machines they refuse to accept the fact and even attack those who dare confront them with it. This is an unusual and compelling horror film, beautifully executed and highly suspenseful.



Deadlands 2: Trapped The Undead Edition Extended & Unrated Blu Ray

Deadlands 2: Trapped is an indie film from director Gary Ugarek. Ugarek made a name for himself with *Deadlands: The Rising*, an impressive zombie film which balanced plot with horror and gore and clearly having a limited budget more than made up for it with innovation. *Deadlands 2* is much the same, while the budget may be limited (it seems higher than the first film) there are lots of creative touches. The plot is intriguing, the soundtrack atmospheric and haunting and the cinematography certainly above par for an indie production. The acting is quite credible and I had no problem entering into the dark world Ugarek creates for us.

The plot focuses on a secret government agency who is undertaking experiments with a new nerve agent. They are warned by one of their own medical team that this agent will not only infect all who come into contact with it but will continue to keep them in a state of animation even after death. Deciding to go ahead with the experiment they cleanly despatch the doctor with a bullet to the back of the head and infect Hagerstown via a careful release of the toxic gas.

Of course the gas not only turns the whole town into zombies but these zombies eat the flesh of other human beings who come their way, including police and security forces.

The human interest is about Sean, Jack and



Shelley who are having a simple night time drive. They see what seems to be a drunk fall in front of the car, Jack investigates but is bitten on the arm. They find the closest place to ask for help and this happens to be a local cinema where they are met by employees Chris and Casey. However it seems the zombies can smell out where they are and they home in for the kill. The government agency continues to monitor the events and indeed are thrilled to find a further development in their experiment. As the agency taunts the survivors in the cinema you know a showdown is coming.

There are lots of zombies in this film and the make-up is impressive, they are very Romero like in their "mood" but can move a lot quicker. The use of the cinema as the only place of refuge which also becomes a prison is effective and on the whole this ends up being a very enjoyable zombie film.

Web: <http://www.playingwithdeadthings.com/>



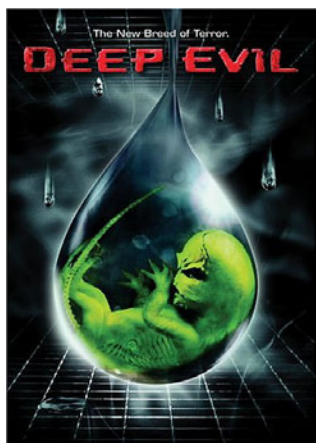
Deep Evil
Science Fiction
Peacock Films
R4 DVD

This very low-budget film is a clone of just about every other escaped -alien-in-a-secret-laboratory film you have ever seen. In spite of that, it's not too bad. Although the plot is riddled with clichés the acting is good, the cinematography is quite decent and the special effects are excellent.

In the 1950s a meteorite landed in Russia. It contained a droplet of water that turned out to be an alien lifeform that is so dangerous it could only be stopped by dropping an atomic bomb on the lab. The U.S. got hold of some and are now repeating the same mistakes in a secret lab in Alaska. The alien has got loose and is eating the scientists, as they do. Before she was ingested one scientist managed to lock down the laboratory.

Now the traditional crack military team (read "cannon fodder") and pair of stropky scientists has been sent to sort out the problem and gather a sample of the "water". Having been well-fed on plump scientists the alien lifeform has now grown and moved on to its next and unsuspected form.

The team soon finds out that the "water" can form replicas of lifeforms based on the DNA it has ingested so the team has to fight off hordes of mutant spiders and zombie-style aliens,



based on the scientists it has eaten. The lifeform is also highly contagious. If it escapes outside the lab it will exterminate every living thing it touches. Yes, it's The End Of Civilisation. Apart from the zombie-like scientists the alien special effects are effective. Much of the film is shot in bright light, not the dark underlit sets favoured by too many directors. I didn't have to strain my eyes trying to see what was going on in the dark.

Although the film will not compete with Alien for sheer terror, I quite enjoyed it.

It's Alive
Sony
R4 DVD

Larry Cohen was a strange and wonderful filmmaker and one of his more unusual cinematic creations was the 1974 It's Alive. It is a film which became a cult classic and is still treasured by those who enjoy genre cinema today. In many ways Cohen's films work well so because they are such





products of the Seventies, they combine such a true of the bizarre with horror and cult elements. The remake has been made by Josef Rusnak who having made such films as *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999) does not necessarily have the cult cred to make it work.

Lenore Harker is in college and pregnant. She is working hard on her degree in literature but when an attempt at abortion via medication goes wrong she decides to keep the baby and move other of town with the kids dad father, Frank. The house is a rather nice "Mexican style" villa overlooking a forest and lake. They live there with Frank's disabled brother Chris, it seems their parents died some years before.

As Lenore settles in and Frank puts the finishing touches to the baby's room, she seems to go into labour – strange considering she is only six months pregnant. Rushing to hospital the doctor advises that the baby has grown to a very large size and must be immediately born via caesarean section. This is where the gore and guts begins and really doesn't stop.

The baby is cut out of its mother's womb and then tears the doctor and nurses to pieces. This is the beginning of Daniel's reign of terror.

When they bring him home he seems to grow at a very fast pace and takes a liking to killing and eating small rats, birds and animals. An unnatural bond seems to develop between Lenore



and Daniel, nothing else matters anymore at all. Certainly Cohen and Rusnak capture the sense of parental obsession and it is depicted in a way that is very disquieting. In many ways this is the only real character development in the whole film, every else is pretty two dimensional.

As the police begin to suspect Leonore Daniel just happily despatches those he sees as a threat. He is a child with simple intelligent but extreme strength and uncontrolled violence. When Marnie drops in to check on Leonore and discuss why she is throwing away her degree both her and her boyfriend are quietly despatched. Soon after comes the police psychologist leading towards the final showdown.

This is certainly a gore hidden horror with only a limited amount of nuance. While total obsession of Leonore with her child is nicely explored, the rest of the film is simply psycho baby madness. I also think the film is a little let-down by bad CGI, the baby isn't too bad but the





fire at the end needs a lot more work. While this is an amusing horror film with a nice warning about the dangers of childbirth (!!!), it certainly does not come close to the original.

(U.K R2 Cover shown)

Parasite
Big Sky Video
Beyond Home Ent.
R4 DVD



I am not sure why I liked this DVD. Parasite is a rather early film; in fact it was described as the first 3-D horror film. The acting isn't great and the editing leaves a bit to be desired. It looks a lot like a low-budget indie film. Still, it does have a very young Demi Moore in a tank top and it has a fairly good plot. It depicts a declining civilisation rather well.

Doctor Paul Dean has accidentally invented a parasite that has infected him. His employers, one of the big government / private corporations that now run the country after a limited nuclear war, would like to use it as a weapon. Paul has other ideas. He flees into the American west taking as much of his research equipment as possible. He is also taking two examples of the



parasite hoping to work out how to kill them. One is in a sealed container, the other is in his belly. Although he can keep his parasite dormant with drugs he knows his time is limited.

He stops in a small town to continue his work. The town is being terrorised by Ricus and his gang. The townspeople don't have much left with which to fight and the gang soon steals Dean's parasite and opens the container. All hell, as you would expect, breaks loose as the parasite enters the body of one of the gang and grows at a terrifying rate.

A merchant, one of the corporation employees, is following Paul and enters the town. Paul must now hide from him, hide from the gang, and find out how to kill the parasite before it gets any bigger and kills more people.

For its age the film has cleaned up well and Beyond has translated it to 16:9 anamorphic, which makes it look much newer than it really is.

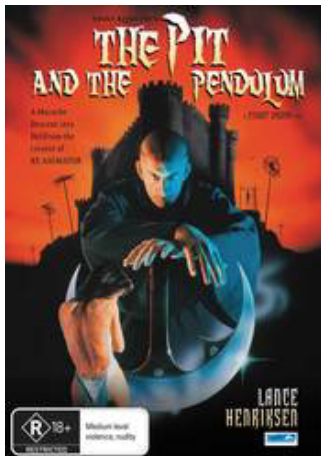


The Pit and the Pendulum
Big Sky Video
Beyond Home Ent.
R4 DVD

The Pit and the Pendulum is a schlock horror spectacular from Stuart Gordon, the creator of Re-Animator. It is based on a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe first published in 1842 and which has had various film adaptations including the Roger Corman cult classic made in 1961 starring Vincent Price. The version of the tale also brings in elements of Poe's The Cask of Amontillado.

It has a surprising number of significant actors including Lance Henriksen, Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton and even a small role by Oliver Reed! Sure, it is only five minutes, but his cameo is significant and makes a nice nod to the greatest Inquisition film of all time The Devils which starred Oliver Reed. Peter O'Toole was originally slated to play Torquemada but due to problems with schedules Lance Henriksen took the role.

The film itself has a lot going for it; it is filled with gore, violence and torture and actually does a pretty good job depicting the madness of the Spanish Inquisition. Henriksen is quite believable as the insane Torquemada who not only hates the sinners he must torture but himself as well. He sees evil everywhere and is more than happy to stand against other priests and even Rome if they refuse to acknowledge his unique role in defending the faith. When he falls "in lust" with Maria his torment knows no bounds.



The sets are surprisingly impressive and look a lot better than one would expect from a film made on a limited budget and it has an excellent soundtrack and memorable cinematography.

A young couple living during the Spanish inquisition are shocked by the violence they see during the Auto De Fe, a public display of penance of condemned heretics which includes witch burning. When the guards take to whipping a child Maria screams in horror and tries to stop the violence only to be accused of witchcraft herself. She is taken into custody while her husband, presumed dead after being knocked out by the guards, has to work out how to help her escape.

In prison she is stripped, abused and tortured but still refuses to confess. The more she refuses, the more Torquemada is seduced by her naiveté and beauty. You know this will not end well. Hubbie now has himself smuggled into the prison to try and rescue her and, as expected, is caught and locked up. As Torquemada intervenes to take Maria's confession, he tries to

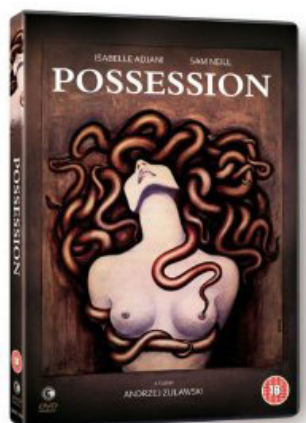


rape her but cannot complete his task. To hide his shame at his lack of manhood he cuts out her tongue !

The story continues with torture, violence, sex and finally, the climactic scene where Torquemada decides to test his ultimate torture device, The Pit and the Pendulum. This is a startling interpretation of Poe's tale which revels in its sensationalist content and certainly offers some great cult entertainment.

Possession Second Sight R2 DVD

Andrzej Zulawski is an enigmatic Polish filmmaker who makes films which shock and challenge. Never far away from controversy his work is marked by an intensity of emotion coupled with a brutal honest and a unique sense of style.



Possession (1981) is one of his most bizarre and unusual films, starring Isabelle Adjani and Sam Neill. It is science fiction horror which is both haunting and controversial. Originally caught up in the "video nasty" row it was banned for many years not only for its high level of gore but for its subject matter which includes everything from self-mutilation and sex to madness.

The film is set in Berlin where Mark (Sam Neill)



is a government agent who has just returned from an assignment. He is debriefed and looks forward to relaxing at home. When he returns home he finds things have drastically changed. Anna, his wife (Isabelle Adjani) has left him for another man, Heinrich. He searches out Heinrich and confronts him only to find that Anna has left him as well and moved onto another relationship. This new relationship, however, is quite different. It seems that Anna, driven by madness and rage, has given birth to a strange many-tentacled creature with which she now makes love many times a day. The creature also needs to be regularly fed, so she is driven to kill to keep it alive.

For the sake of their young son Mark attempts to save the marriage but Anna is impossible to reach. After a private investigator finds the evidence he needs he confronts Anna and her monstrous lover who strangely seems to be transforming into a doppelganger of Mark. Things get even more complicated as Mark becomes interested in his young son's teacher Helen who seems to look a lot like Anna (not surprising as they played by the same actress). Soon the walls of sanity begin to fall apart for all concerned.

Certainly the most controversial aspect of the tale is the dark and confronting sexual imagery used as Anna and the creature have their trysts. The problem is that it would be too easy to become focused on the "octopus" sex (which has resonances with the horror tales of H.P Lovecraft) and not see the symbolism which structures the film. This is a tale which has layers upon layers of symbolism and imagery ranging from the interpersonal and psychological to the mystical and esoteric.

Certainly it is a film with a strongly “European” sense of style. It is filled with intense emotions, sexuality and disturbing imagery. The cinematography is superb and the special effects used to create the slimy creature very convincing. The film may have been made quite a long time ago but the creature still is rather disturbing and the mood created extremely claustrophobic.

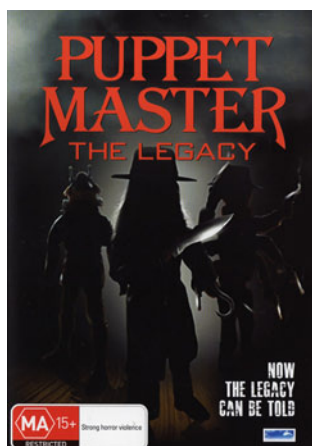
Possession is a startling experience and Second Sight have done a great job bringing a superior copy to DVD.

Extras include The Other Side of the Wall on the making of Possession, an interview with Andrzej Zulawski and a photo gallery.

**Puppet Master
The Legacy
Big Sky Video
Beyond Home Ent.
R4 DVD**

If you were a fan of the Puppet master series this DVD will probably disappoint you. It has little that is new and relies a lot on clips from the seven earlier Puppet Master films. If you have only recently come across the series it will give you a condensed background to the films and may well inspire you to look at the other titles.

Andre Toulon was a puppeteer whose gruesome puppets could come to life and kill people. Each puppet had its own trademark way of inflicting painful death on its enemy. During World



War II Toulon adopted a young Jewish boy, Eric Weiss, who learnt the trade but not the secret of giving the puppets life.

Toulon died and Weiss eventually inherited the puppets after they passed through the hands of a number of owners. Each tried to discover the secret, each failed or died.

Weiss has also spent much of his life searching for Toulon’s animation process. Now he is being hunted for the secret. An “agent” has him at gunpoint in his room and is demanding Toulon’s formula. In a series of flashbacks we see what the puppets are capable of and we are given hints of what the process might be. It appears that the puppets are more than just animated bits of wood. The agent might be in for a surprise, too, when the puppets come to the defence of their master.

In spite of the budget look with all its retro clips



I quite enjoyed the film and I will now look for the others. Legacy doesn't give away enough to spoil them for me, and I look forward to seeing more of the homicidal little toys

Spécialité du Chef
Oh My Gore
R2 DVD

Next time you go to an Chinese restaurant be sure to check what is on the menu ! It could be you !

This is an intriguing and innovative horror film which has taken the well-known zombie genre and tries to do something new with it. The film is essentially a short (26 minutes) which means there is no extraneous packaging, just a good solid gore ridden horror experience, high on mood and suspense and rich with blood and guts.

The film opens with a close-up of a man with a metal plate attached to his mouth hanging from the roof. There are three individuals in the room, each with different dates on tags hanging from their necks.

He becomes frantic when he hears voices from behind a plastic screen preparing to drug him. He starts to struggle at the rope binding his wrists together and eventually frees his arms. Now he must undertake the agonizing task of removing the metal mask which is bolted on his face, he falls to the fall loosing lots of blood in the process.

As the story unfolds we realize that people are murdered, and then brought back to life just before being dissected, cooked and served. It seems reanimating the bodies gives the meat just the right texture!

Our main character is a restaurant critic who went to evaluate this well established Asian restaurant and ended up in their larder. When he escapes he gives them lots of bother including getting into a brawl with lots of other zombies who are held in a collective larder. The film is nicely shot and while clearly low budget, the special effects and gore are very credible. The score creates a good mood and the lighting and



cinematography are very successful.

The audio is very clear, French Dolby 2.0 with optional French, English, German, and Spanish subtitles, all of which are easy to read.

There are a range of extras including a documentary making of but these do not have subtitles.

Spécialité du Chef is a very successful horror film directed by Frenchman Gregory Sacre and available directed from Oh My Gore.

Web: <http://www.ohmygore.com/>

Tour de Force
Denmark
Cetus Productions

Danish subtitled in English

Frank is a cop working the night shift. This is causing problems with his wife who suspects he is having an affair.

One night Frank comes home, tired, and leaves his gun on the table. His young son finds the gun and accidentally shoots himself.





We cut to a year later and things are not going well for Frank. His wife has gone home to England and Frank has left the Police following a nervous breakdown. Desperate, he has crossed over to the criminal side where he is now a hitman for hire. He works through a mobster, Holger, who demands total loyalty and efficiency from his staff. Unfortunately Frank is now developing some qualms about his job and his efficiency is dropping. He leaves a witness to one of his killings alive and knocks back another well-paying job because he doubts the client's motives.

Holger's drug dealing operation is already under pressure and he feels he doesn't need a hitman who is developing a conscience about his work. He arranges to have Frank killed by another hitman but the job is botched and Frank is left alive, now intent on vengeance.

Independent producer Kim Sonderholm, who also wrote the story, has produced a great old-fashioned crime film. It is savage, bloody and politically incorrect in the current day but if you like your entertainment with a real bite you will like this film.



Sonderholm is also a very good actor and despite Frank's antisocial job you can't help sympathising with him the way Sonderholm plays the character. He has also picked an excellent group of supporting actors and actresses and the whole film has a professional well-crafted touch that belies its independent origins. The only real fault I could pick is that the subtitles need redoing. The English is atrocious but even this can't detract from what is a great film.

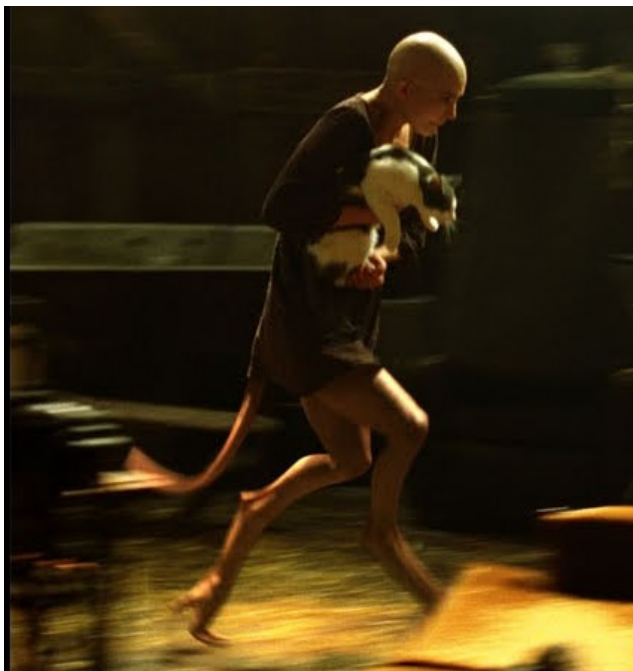
Splice Warner Bros Cinema Release

Splice is a modern Frankenstein tale set in the world of genetic research. Genetic engineers Clive (Adrien Brody) and Elsa (Sarah Polley) have been working on the creation of new species by bringing together the DNA from different animals. They have produced an amazing creature which will produce new genetic material which will revolutionize animal science and agriculture for many years to come. However, Clive and Elsa do not wish to stop at animal hybrids. They believe that they can use their new splicing technique to create a new human-animal hybrid which could open a new world of genetic medicine.



The company they work for (NERD) is not so convinced, they have invested big bucks in the original project and want immediate bankable results before embarking on a new, and potentially more ethically explosive, series of experi-





ments. They are worried about possible controversy about any human –animal experiments and do not want their company to be the centre of a debate about such issues.

Elsa has many inner demons, including a mother who was mentally unstable and a love-hate relationship with the idea of being a mother. Under the pressure of losing the right to take what she perceives to be her research forward Elsa decides to take matters into her own hands. She convinces Clive to work with her promising to abort the embryo before birth, but things move to quickly and are soon out of control. Clive and Elsa now have a strange and bizarre monster child which they name Dren. She has a lot of human characteristics but is unable to learn the boundaries or structures of social interaction. Her body includes a poison tail stinger and has many unusual characteristics, her legs are more animal like and she grows at an alarming speed.

At the first public display of the original project things go horribly wrong, it seems all this splicing has made the specimens unstable and the two lovable little creatures tear each other to shreds in front of a terrified audience of scientists and investors. Not only are they unstable but they have changed sex and Clive and Elsa seem unable to extract the necessary genetic information from their remains to complete the project.

Clive and Elsa must work fast as Dren is hidden inside the lab and may easily be discovered,



they move Dren to an isolated farm. However, as Dren develops emotions erupt as the scientists lose their ethical bearings, including an uncomfortable scene when Clive is seduced by Dren's beauty and allows himself a dangerous moment of passion.

This is certainly a strange and wonderful Frankenstein tale, the CGI alone makes this a superb work of science fiction horror. Dren is an astounding creation which evokes both a sense of horror and pity, she is both beautiful and yet repelling. This "ickyness" makes the film stand out from many of a similar ilk. Indeed the mixture of horror, psychological terror, sex and genetics reminds me of the earlier work of David Cronenberg, another Canadian filmmaker.

The psychological aspects of the story which explore themes of parenthood, personal and scientist boundaries and neurosis and jealousy are well represented. The acting is solid and the cinematography excellent.

The film does require a certain "willing suspension of disbelief". Just how many scientists would be stupid enough to go this far and then continue to pile on error after error. That being said it is a great science fiction horror story and worth seeing.

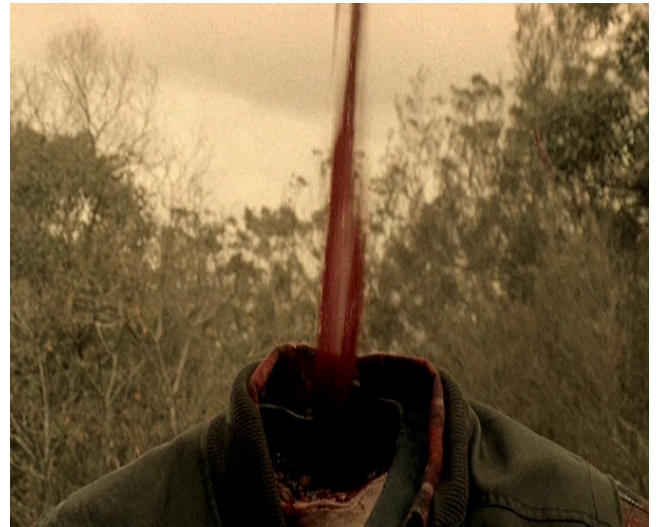




**Undead
Madman
Entertainment
R4**

When I started watching this film there was sense of déjà vu and, sure enough, I had seen it before. It was released in 2002 - 2003 and I watched it on rental but I haven't seen it since. I enjoyed it a lot at the time so it was like the return of an old friend.

It could probably be best described as a "zombies meet rednecks" parody set in an Australian country town. It looks a little clichéd (well, it has a LOT of clichés) but after all, that's the nature of a parody – take a cliché and then ridicule it. It also took a swipe at stereotype Australian characters, and there is a lovely scene



where the hero is out fishing on the lake in his boat and is blasted by an alien meteorite. This is an obvious spoof of the opening scenes of another Australian film, *The Man Who Sued God*, but in that film the hero's catch didn't turn into zombie fish and try to eat him.

The story is simple. The hero has been briefly kidnapped by aliens but escaped. When he told his story he was laughed at so he went into seclusion, but he knows the aliens will be back so he has prepared. The aliens duly return and start turning people into zombies with their virus-infected meteorites. They seal off the town and it's up to the residents to put aside their bickering and personal squabbles and unite to beat off the menace. They have to breach the wall around the town and let the outside world know what is coming.

There are some wonderful characters, from Marion (Mungo McKay), the quietly spoken Clint Eastwood-type hero who owns way too many guns, to the local beauty queen (Miss Catch of the Day) who is bitter that she lost out because she was a little bit pregnant in the last



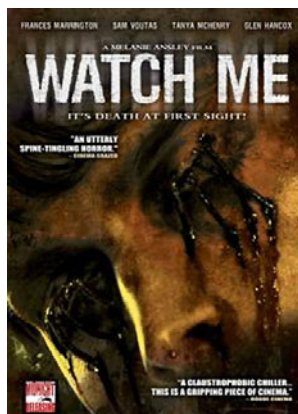
competition. The local police sergeant is unable to cope. *"When I was a kid we respected our parents, we didn't eat 'em"* and simply can't accept that his town has been taken over by zombies. *"Its all those fuckin' crack marijuana fuckin' hippie fuckin' surfie fuckin' dolebludgin' pricks"*. Beautifully expressed but not helpful.

For a small budget independent film Undead showed what could be done with the genre. Part of its secret is it is just a little over the top as a zombie film but has enough comic touches to stop the story bogging down in blood and intestines, something American independents sometimes forget.

This is always a hard balance to strike but the producers achieved it well. Undead is loads of fun and it's great to see it released again.

Watch Me Australia Scopofile Production

This is one of the best films for sheer horror that I have seen this year. It's an independent production but has a really polished look to it that defies its low-budget origins.



"Watch Me" is the title of an email attachment that is making the rounds, but it has a couple of unusual features. While the attachment is a revolting film clip of a snuff movie, it is not the attachment that is the problem.

The viewer will receive a visit from a ghostly redhaired girl dressed in yellow who will kill them then sew their eyes shut. The attachment then sends itself on to someone else from the receiver's contacts list. Tess Hooper is a film student.



She is helped by a fellow student, a rather sleazy merchant of obscure porn and other films. He seems to know more about Watch Me than he says and it turns out that he has seen the clip and survived. He forces Tess to watch the clip and she survives as well. Why? Why did the ghost leave her alone when so many others are dying?

Since the two appear to have nothing in common it is hard to see how they can help each other but they both realise they must stop Watch Me somehow. Neither remember that attachments can be sent in other ways. Tess thinks she can stop the slaughter if she can break the chain by stopping the attachment mailing itself to anyone else, but Watch Me has a mind of its own..

Producer / directors Sam Voutas and Melanie Ansley have come up with a brilliant piece of work. I particularly liked the way that they didn't make everything look dark and gloomy, which seems to be a cliché in such films. I did find the modern noises each time a computer dialled up to be rather old fashioned. Surely students have caught up with broadband by now? That's the only minor flaw I noticed in the film – otherwise it's solid tension and terror all the way through.



No Blood No Tears
Third Windows Films
R2 DVD

Korean with English subtitles

Director Ryu Seung-Wan has given us a brilliant if tangled drama that has often been compared with English director Guy Ritchie's best work. In many ways I think this film may be better than Ritchie's work. The plot is just as complex but the background of the Korean gangster mobs double crossing each other to retain power in an economic recession is brilliant. His characters are more down-to-earth and less comic. They are also more violent.

Gyung-sun is a struggling middle-aged taxi driver, trying to make ends meet while paying off her ex-husband's gambling debt to a local easy-going mob bookie nicknamed KGB. She is no stranger to crime since she was once an accomplished safecracker, but that's all in her past now.

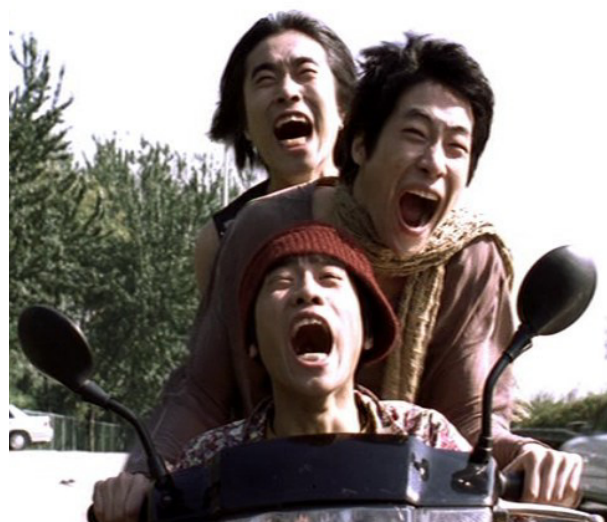
Soo-jin is a young bimbo who wants to become a singer. She is the girlfriend of a small-time local mobster named Bulldog who runs illegal dogfights and pays a large amount of the take to his boss KGB. He beats Soo-jin regularly and has left her with a scar under one eye that will have to be fixed before she has any hope of a singing career. Meanwhile she wears sunglasses to hide the scar. She wants revenge and a career of her own that doesn't involve being beaten by a drunk.



The gangs are being further squeezed by turf wars for the contracting profitable areas. There is a hilarious almost-fight scene between KGB's thugs and a group of older gangsters called the United Handicapped Democrats for reasons that will only be clear once you see the film.

KGB is struggling to keep up the payments to his boss, who is urging him to be more violent in his treatment of gambling debt defaulters. It seems everyone all the way up the chain of command is feeling the pinch of a collapsing economy and it all seems to be piling up on Gyung-sun.

One night she meets Soo-jin and they swap stories. Soo-jin has an idea that might solve their problems, but she will need Gyung-sun's help. Gyung-sun reluctantly agrees, but she has been beaten by one of the gang bosses and wants her revenge just like Soo-jin. Bulldog is soon going to run a rigged dogfight and there will be large amounts of money in the office. She has a way to steal the money from



him. Unfortunately so do the other gang bosses. And a bunch of waiters who want their revenge on the gangsters. And a renegade junior mobster who has somewhat divided loyalties. Soo-jin and Gyung-sun do not quite trust each other either. The police are keeping an eye on all of them.

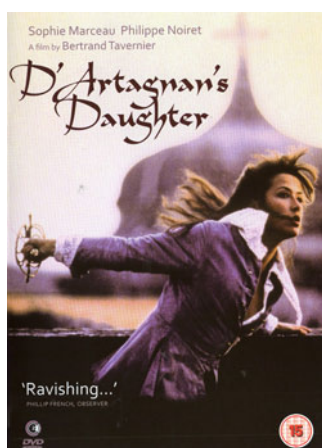
The stage is set for a truly complex set of battles as the money changes hands every few minutes. There is a bloody fight every few minutes as well, and that's a lot of fights in a two-hour film. There is a little comedy to lighten the story but overall it becomes one almost continuous run of violence until the matter is finally (?) settled.

I liked the film and the quality acting. The characters are a little two-dimensional but this doesn't really show with the fast pace of the film.

**D'Artagnan's Daughter
Second Sight
Films
R2 DVD**

*French with English
subtitles*

The Three Musketeers must be regarded as France's greatest literary work if the number of original films, spinoffs and follow-ups is considered. The story of three honest men fighting to defend the honour of their queen has



captured the imagination of many generations and has given film producers an excuse for dazzling swordplay, wonderful costumes and spectacular castles. This film is no different but adds the elements of an attractive daughter, Eloise, and a comic touch provided by the now aging musketeers.

Once again the throne is in danger. The young about-to-be-crowned Louis is at risk from the usual ambitious cardinal and a rogue Duke who has already arranged with other traitors to divide France between them if Louis can be killed before the coronation. The Duke has been smuggling arms into France to aid his revolution.

The Mother Superior of a convent on his lands is aware of his plotting so he has the convent attacked and everyone in it killed. The only one to escape is Eloise who goes to Paris to find her father and have the Duke's wrongs punished. D'Artagnan must put together the old (literally) group of musketeers as well as deal with his unruly daughter and a poet who wants to marry her. Only then can the four of them save the King.

It's a lot of fun in the traditional swashbuckling style. The cinematography and settings are excellent, there is lots of swordplay and cleavage but surprisingly little blood, and all the stereotyped characters you could imagine. Although the film dates back to 1994 Second Sight's DVD release does it credit.



MicMacs
AKA Mic Macs a
Tire-Larigot
Hopscotch
R4 DVD

French with English subtitles



Mic Macs is a quirky French comedy with a really dark side. It deals with the international armaments industry and its effects on innocent people. Young Basil is one such. His father was killed in Algeria by a land mine he was defusing and Basil himself has a bullet in his brain from a driveby shooting in which he was the "innocent bystander". On his discharge from hospital he finds he has lost his job, all his belongings and any hope of a normal future because the bullet in his head is a constant risk to his life.

He is living rough on the streets and meets Slammer, an ex-criminal who was saved from execution and pardoned when the guillotine stuck. Slammer introduces Basil to his friends, a motley group who live in a junkyard and survive by recycling and repairing the waste they scavenge. Basil is accepted by the group and fits right in.

One day as they are out scavenging he passes the headquarters of the two big arms companies who made the land mine and the bullet. He slips into the shareholders' meeting of one company and finds the Chairman is not only proud of the dreadful weapons he makes but makes a joke of the collateral damage they cause. Basil decides on revenge and with the



help of his new friends he comes up with a complex plan that involves turning the companies against each other.

With the help of his friends' special talents he can put his plan into effect. There is Calculator, a lady whose special talent is mathematics and statistics, Pete who can craft automatons and other beautiful pieces of machinery from junk, Buster the human cannonball and Elastic Girl, whose contortionist abilities are almost unbelievable.

Their plot, of course, often goes wrong but with Slammer's planning there is always a Plan B.

Although the film has many funny moments that help to moderate the violence Mic Macs is still a grim movie. It is subtle in a way that U.S. filmmakers can rarely achieve. Although the heroes are rejects we come to see them after a while as normal people with normal ambitions, as well as a certain animal cunning resulting from their position at the bottom of society. Their loyalty to one another is what makes the plan succeed in the end.



**Nomad – The Warrior
Roadshow
Entertainment
R4 DVD**

**Kazakhstan
English version**

After Ghengis Khan's Mongol hordes swept across Asia the great high plains north of the Hindu Kush were populated by small tribes of peaceful nomadic herders, moving around to find pasture for their goats and herds of horses. The Mongols had contracted back to their homelands but some tribes made regular raids on the small Kazakh tribes. Disunited, the Kazakh were powerless to stop these raids. A prophecy held that one day a Chosen One, a descendant of Ghenghis Khan, would unite the tribes and push out the invaders.

A single nomad Oraz the Wise believes that the Chosen One has been born. The baby is the son of the Kazakh Sultan's new wife and she is on her way to join her husband in the capital city of Turkistan. The Mongol Khan is made aware of this by his own shaman and sends a troop of soldiers to kill everyone in the small caravan. Oraz arrives just in time to save the baby. He takes the child back to the capital and reunites him with his father. He then asks that



he be allowed to bring up the boy as a warrior and the Chosen One. The Sultan agrees, trusting Oraz.

The boy Mansur grows up in the company of a small group of children selected by Oraz from all the Kazakh tribes. They will be the force that will defend the Kazakh and unite the tribes. He also falls in love with one of the village girls.

In due course the Mongols attack again. The attack is launched straight at the capital city. In single combat Oraz defeats the Mongol champion and the Mongols leave, but not too far. They capture Gahar, the young girl Mansur is in love with, and her brother. The only way she can save her brother is to marry the Khan and become one of his wives. The Mongols once again attack the city.

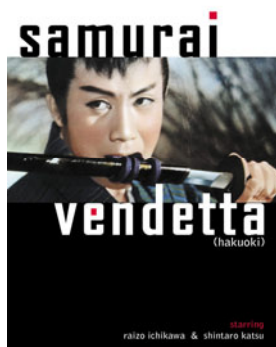
Again it is left to Oraz the Wise to defend the city, but not in the way intended. Under Mansur the Chosen One the Kazakh tribes finally unite and defeat the Mongols in a massive one hundred day battle, but the victory is not without great cost to him.

The legend is a wonderful piece of film. The scenery is magnificent, the battles are impressive and bloody, the actors skilled and sympathetic to their parts. It is a pleasure to see the history of other countries being aired, especially when done as well as this film.



Samurai Vendetta
AnimEigo
R1 DVD

Samurai Vendetta is also known as Hakuoki and is presented in Japanese with clear removable English subtitles.



Although this is really a love story it has enough swordplay to keep the fans going. It is set in feudal Japan, a time of bickering warlords jockeying for influence and prestige. Each maintained a small private army of samurai whose job was to defend their lord with their life and to cut down his enemies.

Yasubei is a young swordsman in training. On graduation he will use his school's prestige and contacts to gain a job with one of the local lords. Before this can happen his school is challenged to a fight to the death by another local school. By the time he gets there most of his classmates are slaughtered, but he cuts down the opposing swordsmen almost singlehanded. His bravery and skill is noticed by Tange, a samurai working for a local lord. When Yasubei is later attacked by the remainder of the losing school Tange steps in and saves Yasubei, who now feels that he owes Tange a big debt.

Yasubei is offered a job with the same lord who employs Tange. He meets the lord's daughter and falls in love with her, but finds she is to marry Tange. Out of respect for Tange he declines the job and finds work instead with an opposing lord. Fate, however, keeps pushing the three together.



The situation cannot last like this. In the tangled politics and honour system of the times there seems no way out as they are thrust closer together by events. Yasubei will get his chance to repay his debt to Tange, but will he get the woman? Can any of them survive the loss of honour that any action they take will incur?

For a change the love story overshadows the swordplay, which is surprisingly restrained. It is still, however, a violent film of violent times.

The complex history of the times is partly explained in a section of the extras. AnimEigo has



also included their top-of-screen subtitles to briefly explain some of the terms that do not translate to English very well. These are not distracting but you need to be a fast reader or use the Pause button to keep up with them sometimes.

If it's swordplay you are after then there are bloodier films. If you like a bit more plot and a little more restraint in the bloodshed then this one will appeal to you.

Tell Me Something
Eastern Eye
Madman
R4 DVD

Korean with English subtitles

This title has been around for a couple of years now and I have finally caught up with it. It is a superb, gritty detective story in the Korean style – lots of blood and violence to a level that wouldn't be tolerated now in the U.S.

Dismembered bodies are turning up, with a peculiar twist. The parts don't all belong to the same body. There seems to be a serial killer at work. Lieutenant Cho, under suspicion for graft, is given the investigation. A quick result will do a lot to rebuild his credibility.

A quick result is not going to happen, though. His investigations point to suspect after suspect and they keep turning up in bits. Suyeon Chae, a girl who has been involved with all the suspects and victims, is a logical suspect but even

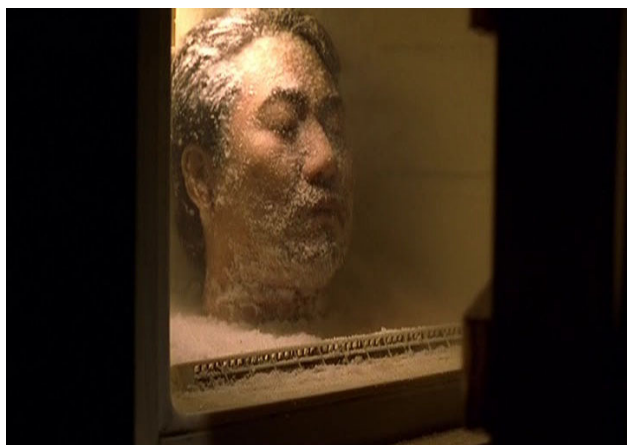


she must eventually be eliminated.

Since she knew all the victims and appears to know more about them than she is saying Cho places her under police protection. Now the killer seems to be getting closer to her and still the bodies are piling up. Cho is forming an attachment to her. Is this interfering with his judgment? Is he missing something?

Then one of the police officers in his squad gets too close and is killed. Cho is taken off the case. He won't let go, though and continues his investigation quietly. When he finally cracks the case the results are not at all what he expected.

In spite of the bloodshed, the mortuary scenes and the violence as the killer strikes they are necessary to show the horror of the crimes. The Korean film industry doesn't sanitise its films and as a result they look far more realistic than the super glossy American shows. This film is one of the better examples.



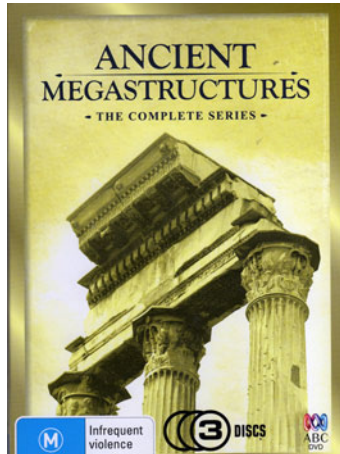
**Ancient
Megastructures
Roadshow
Entertainment
R4 DVD**

Many of the greatest of the truly ancient megastructures around the world have now disappeared. Those that are left fill us with a sense of wonder that those early “primitive” people could engineer and build such marvels with primitive tools. Many of the structures shown here are comparatively recent – say from the last four or five hundred years – but even they pushed the boundaries of engineering past what was previously known. Many of the innovations shown were simply trial and error. The errors were expensive.

It is surprising how many were built because of the demands of religion. Even the pyramids were a result of the Pharaohs’ obsession with the afterlife. Chartres cathedral was an attempt to outdo everyone else’s cathedrals by a power hungry bishop. Angkor Wat in Cambodia was so full of religious symbolism because the king wanted to ensure his place in the afterlife.

The Alhambra in Spain was an attempt to bluff a Moorish ruler’s neighbours with how powerful he was in the hope that they would leave his kingdom alone in the Christian march for power in the area. St Paul’s cathedral in London was Christopher Wren’s attempt to leave a monument that would dominate the city.

The documentary series covers nine great structures and the engineering problems of each. The ingenuity of the old architects and



engineers was fully tested, not only with satisfying the demands of their clients but with inventing new ways to build the structures they demanded. We get a good understanding of the different types of arches and their relative values, of the importance of good foundations, and of the difficulties of mobilising a suitable labour force.

The series covers The Chartres cathedral, The Colosseum, the Great Pyramid, Petra, the Alhambra palace, St Paul’s cathedral, Hagia Sophia, Machu Picchu and Angkor Wat. The architecture and engineering are explained by a series of experts in their field and many re-enactments are used to show the techniques of the builders.

It must be said that there is one very annoying feature about the series. Every time there is a major scenery change it is accompanied by an irrelevant whooshing or thudding sound effect that quickly becomes annoying. Note to the Director: STOP IT.

This criticism apart, the series is a valuable and educational insight into the ancient engineering techniques. There is so much more to these megastructures than you will see on a postcard.



The BBC Natural History Collection
BBC Earth
Roadshow Australia
Blu Ray
6 Disc Box Set

The BBC Natural History Collection includes four quite astounding high definition documentary series packaged in a nice presentation box. The set includes *Nature's Great Events*, *Yellowstone*, *Galapagos* and *Wild China*.

Nature's Great Events explores how the changes of the seasons transform the planet and create some of the most spectacular natural events you could ever imagine.

Yellowstone is the Earth's most extensive thermal area and is home to more than 10,000 natural springs, fumaroles, mud pots and geysers. This fascinating documentary takes you inside one of the world's most amazing natural wonders and focuses on the many diverse species that live there.

Galapagos examines the special wildlife, flora and fauna of these amazing islands, many of which are found nowhere else on earth and which were of pivotal significance within the development of the theory of evolution and its mechanism, natural selection.

Finally *Wild China* takes a comprehensive look at the surprising diversity of landscape and life in China covering the rainforests, deserts and, of course, the Himalayas.

Nature's Great Events

Nature's Great Events is a truly epic exploration of the global climatic landscape of planet earth. It offers the very best in cinematography as well as excellent storytelling and brilliant narration by David Attenborough. The series is presented on two blu ray discs and runs for 5 hours and 55 minutes. Each episode includes a behind the scenes extra called *Nature's Great Event Diary*.

Episode 1 is *The Great Melt* which deals with that incredible annual climate transformation which is the Arctic land and sea melt. It highlights the life and death struggle of the creatures of the Arctic including the Polar Bear, Arctic fox, Beluga Whale and Narwhal.



Episode 2 explores *The Great Summer Run*, a time when the Pacific Salmon struggle upstream to their spawning site, encountering grizzly bears along the way. We also come to experience the lives of bears and wolves in the Alaskan mountains.

Episode 3 documents *The Great Migration* of Wildebeest and Zebra on the Serengeti and we also get to follow a pride of lions.

Episode 4 is *The Great Tide*, the time when Sardines migrate along the east coast of Africa along with gannets, dolphins, sharks and whales all wanting their share of food.

Episode Five, *The Great Flood* shows the flooding of the Kalahari plains from the Okavango Delta transforming it into lush wetlands overflowing with buffalo, elephants, hippos, dragonflies, lions and wading birds.



Polar Bear—The Great Melt



Episode Six ends the series with *The Great Feast* where the plankton explosion in British Columbia and Alaska creates a feeding frenzy of killer whales, humpback whales, sea-lions and dolphins.

Yellowstone

This series is a year in the lives of several of Yellowstone's celebrated wildlife: the bison, grizzly bears, foxes, wolves, beavers, and elk.

They are presented in three episodes: *Winter*, *Summer* and *Autumn* which explore the change of the seasons and the interaction between climate, the environment and animal life. The cinematography is breathtaking as we experience the great extremes of weather in this beautiful location and see how animals survive in this harshest of climates.

While the series is, of course, focused on the animals of Yellowstone, there is also lots of background on the unique geology of the region and in the final episode, *Autumn*, coverage of the Volcanic activity of Yellowstone where even in the most hostile conditions life still survives, even if only in the form of bacteria.



Winter: Yellowstone Wolves

The extras are *The People of Yellowstone* which highlight the local experts who aided in the filming of the series. Peter Firth's narration is clear and informative and the way in which environmentalism and various ecological issues are tied into the presentation is certainly to be commended.

Galápagos

The Galápagos Islands were considered the most significant location in the world by Charles Darwin due to their unique wildlife brought about by geographic isolation and special climatic conditions. He spent some five years on the HMS Beagle, a retired navy vessel studying the local species, collecting specimens and developing his theories, but it was on the Galapagos that he believed he had struck "gold" and it is from his research on the Islands that the evolutionary of natural selection and the theory of evolution was discovered.

The series is 150 minutes and presented in three episodes, *Born of Fire*, *Islands that Changed the World* and *Forces of Change*.

Episode 1 *Born of Fire* introduces us to the Island, discusses its Volcanoes, lava fields and the way in which their geography and climate influenced the wildlife that evolved on them.

Episode 2 *Islands that Changed the World* focuses on the unique wildlife of the Galapagos and the role they play within Darwin's theory of evolution.



Galápagos Marine Iguanas

Episode 3 *Forces of Change* discusses how some of the more fascinating creatures of the Galapagos evolved including giant tortoises, marine iguanas and blue-footed boobies.

The Galapagos Islands have long been a favourite of biologists and this documentary series evokes the unique characteristics of a world which, at times, seem to be long out of time. It offers a balanced exploration of the myriad aspects of this fascinating location including geography, history, Volcanography, evolutionary theory and wildlife. These are matched with stunning high definition cinematography and informative yet enjoyable narration by Tilda Swinton.

Wild China

Wild China is a fascinating and unusual addition to this set. It is a travel series which examines the history, people and wildlife of China and environs. It is an unusual series in that it attempts to do justice to both the historical and wildlife content carefully avoiding any of the contentious issues surrounding China.

While Tibet is certainly well covered, any controversies are ignored and the emphasis placed on the unique animals of the region and on the way in which Tibetan Buddhists perceive and interact with the natural environment. It is difficult to achieve a balance between such diverse elements in a single series especially when controversial issues abound. Personally I felt Wild China at times became a bit too much like a travelogue, especially when dealing with Chinese history. It was on much firmer ground when it focused on the wildlife and this is where I found it most informative.

Wild China is comprised of six episodes, narrated by Bernard Hill.

Episode 1 *Heart of the Dragon* opens the series with a visit to China's paddy fields and lakes and to some of the oldest manmade structures in the world. We also get to meet some of the inhabitants of the paddy fields including a diverse number of birds, freshwater waters, alligators and bats.

Episode 2 *Shangri-La* moves to the base of the Himalayas and the Nujiang River. It documents the plantlife of the river and then moves onto the

snowy stretches of Kawkarpo, one of the most significant ecosystems of the Gaoligong Mountains. There are elephants, monkeys, gibbons, small apes and all sorts of jungle mammals and we also get an introduction to the problem of China's cities expanding into the pristine countryside.



Snow Leopard

Episode 3 *Tibet* is a fascinating journey into the landscape and wildlife of Tibet including Snow Leopards, Tibetan Bears, Tibetan Foxes, Snakes and insects. Avoiding controversy, the series also explores Tibetan Buddhists and their unique traditions and how it relates to the environment.

Episode 4 goes *Beyond the Great Wall* and we come face to face with Nomadic tribes, Siberian tigers and the great expanse which is the Gobi desert.

In Episode 5 *Land of the Panda*, there is a comprehensive look at the way in which people and wildlife influence each other, for good and bad. Special focus is placed on Giant Pandas, Golden Snub Nosed Monkeys and Chinese alligators.

Episode 6 *Tides of Change* explores the Chinese coastline and once again consider how animals and humans influence each other. This time the focus is on whale sharks, dolphins and the diverse birdlife of the region.

Wild China also includes a 27-minute behind-the-scenes featurette called *Hunting Dragons*. It's a lengthy and interesting look at the camera techniques, production difficulties, and camera-man dedication.

Each of these series are impressively presented, include high definition cinematography and insightful commentaries. I personally enjoyed *Nature's Great Events* and *Galapagos* the most, but all are very informative as well as enjoyable. The ability to balance entertainment, education and visual beauty in these series is exemplary and purchasing them in a box set makes them a very enticing option.

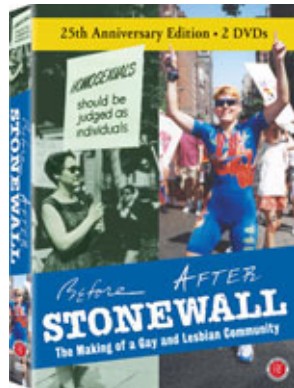
**Before and
After Stonewall
25th Anniversary
Edition
First Run Features
R1 DVD**

Before Stonewall is a superb documentary directed by Greta Schiller, originally released in 1984, First Run Films is re-releasing this classic film in a 25th Anniversary Special Edition with a second DVD, After Stonewall.

Before Stonewall takes a decade by decade look at the experience of gays and lesbians from the early years of the 20th century to the momentous events of the Stonewall Riots. We have fascinating insights into what it was like to live as a gay man or lesbian in the 20s, 30s and 40s and the opportunities and dangers each decade posed. We come to appreciate the significant role homosexuals played in the World Wars and yet how the very military they served turned against them in paranoid fury in the Fifties through the witch hunt trials of the McCarthy era.

We also come to understand the interactions between Black, Women's and Gay Liberation movements and the way in which a number of small organizations, the Mattachine Society and Sisters of Bilitis, were able to ferment a mood for change within the previously loose knit "homosexual" network.

Before Stonewall balances rare footage, documents and images with interviews with such figures as Allen Ginsberg, Audre Lorde and Jose Sarria among many, many others giving recol-



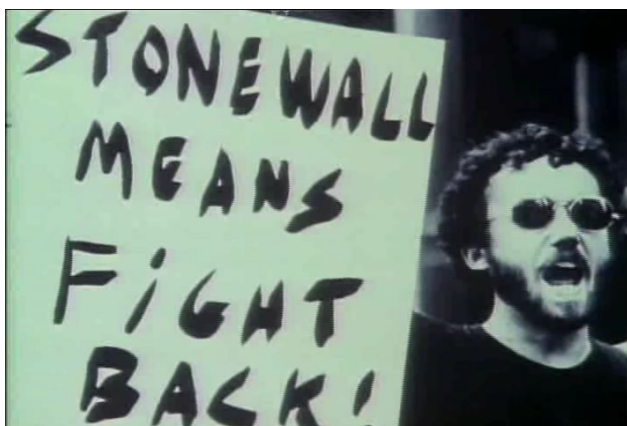
lections of what it was like to live as a gay man or woman before Stonewall.

Narrated by Rita Mae Brown, it offers a good balance between general commentary and individual experience and between interviews and film footage. This gives the documentary a light and personal touch which is both informative and entertaining, amusing and yet, at times, quite moving.

After Stonewall continues documenting the struggle. It is directed by John Scagliotti, Janet Baus & Dan Hunt and Narrated by Melissa Etheridge. It is a true roller coaster ride as it captures the struggles from the Stonewall riots through sexual liberation, hard won acceptance in some quarters and terrible defeats as fundamentalists fight back. It also explores the effect HIV/AIDS had on the movement as it first cause a terrifying loss of life and associated loss of confidence but then, as never before, brought lesbian and gay people together to fight a common foe. This section of the film is especially moving and includes documentation of HIV/AIDS research measures and the Quilt.

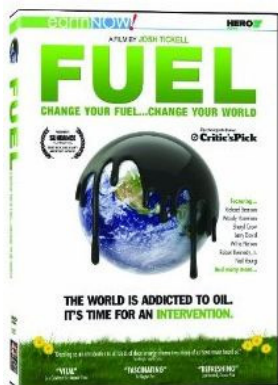
Featuring Dorothy Allison, Michael Bronski, Rita Mae Brown, Barney Frank, Barbara Gittings, Arnie Kantrowitz, Larry Kramer, Craig Lucas, Armistead Maupin, Leslea Newman, Barbara Smith, and many others.

The two remarkable films, Before & After Stonewall, tell the remarkable tale of how homosexuals, a heretofore hidden and despised group, became a vibrant and integral part of America's family, and, indeed, the global community.



Fuel **Cinema Libre Studio** **R1 DVD**

This is not just another doco about the evils of the oil industry. Promisingly, it looks in depth at the alternatives to oil for the future. There are more than I thought and producer Josh Tickell goes into more detail on them than I have seen before.



The story is really in four separate strands. There is the personal side. His mother's family lives along the stretch of the Louisiana bayou where there is one of the world's largest concentrations of oil refineries between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. The air, water and ground are polluted and the cancer rate is abnormally high. Josh's family members have been dying from unusual causes for many years, and it seems the fumes and pollution may also be affecting the reproductive process of residents.

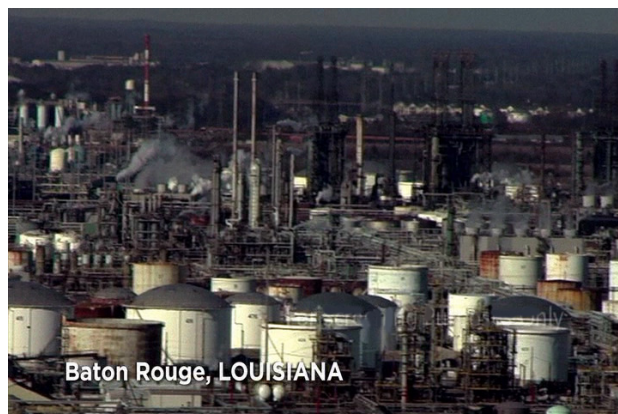
The second strand is the political side – oil companies tied with Government is a sure recipe for no change. Josh feels that people power will be the only way that this combination can be broken. He quotes from Ghandi: "Where the people lead, the leaders will follow". Good luck, since there appears to be no large-scale organised resistance to the oil lobby.

As an alternative to this, though, Josh gives us examples of where individual actions have had an effect. Las Vegas has one of the country's biggest fleets of school buses and they all now use biodiesel made from soy, maize or recycled vegetable oil. There was no conversion cost –



oil-based diesel and biodiesel are completely compatible. Many truck drivers are now convinced of the value of biodiesel and change over to it whenever it is available. I was interested to find that Rudolf Diesel's original engine was designed to run on peanut oil. Unfortunately the move to biodiesel was undermined by discussions on the cost of growing crops for fuel rather than for food. Josh points out that the U.S. needs cheap food to export in exchange for imported oil.

The third strand is the alternatives currently available. Many green movements are dedicated to solar as the only future power source, and it has its advantages. The cost of making and setting up solar plants is high, though, and solar energy is not really suitable for transport use unless converted and stored as electricity. This adds further to the cost. He looks at alternatives that can use the existing infrastructure. For transport, he feels that a return to biodiesel is the way of the future. Apart from recycled vegetable oil he looks at companies that are producing biodiesel from algae beds – the original way that the oil reserves were formed. Experiments suggest that oil can be harvested from algae in as little as three days. The algae need warm water, carbon dioxide and sunlight – conditions that exist already at many power





stations. Is it possible that a power station could become almost self-sufficient in its own fuel production? I have not seen this proposition discussed before.

Apart from algae, biomass (trees, vegetable waste) can also be processed into fuels. Scientists are developing a Megaflora tree that reaches maturity in three years and could provide the needed amount of biomass quickly and cheaply. It also has the advantage that it can be grown in marginal lands and can actually improve the soil by removing toxic components. It will not require croplands to be converted to oil crops and it is comparatively low cost because the tree regenerates from its own stump, eliminating the need for costly replanting..

In the fourth strand Josh looks at ways of making our cities more self-sufficient, not only by energy saving but by such logical moves as growing food in the cities to avoid the transport costs. We see an example of a futuristic "vertical farm" that could use a footprint of one city block to produce significant amounts of food such as fruit and vegetables. The usual alternatives like solar and biodiesel are looked at but Josh examines them in the far more intelligent context of being just a part of the total solution. It is this rational mixed approach to the technologies that I find makes the documentary so much more credible.

There are negatives in the documentary. There are the usual figures given out without a source to back them up, he is coy about the capital cost of setting up the new technologies, and he relies a lot on people power (a notoriously short-span thing) to make the political changes necessary. Apart from these, though, I think he is on the right track.

**The Silver Screen
Color Me Lavender
Waterbearer Films
R1 DVD**

The Silver Screen: Color Me Lavender is a film by Mark Rappaport starring Dan Butler of *Frasier* fame as our guide. It offers a comprehensive overview of the undercurrents of gay sexuality as found throughout the history of Hollywood cinema. From the more explicit and obvious stereotypes of the sissy and queen through the subtleties of male-male relationships as depicted within the Western this is a perceptive and insightful journey. Rich analysis is offered of the comedy of such actors as Bob Hope, Danny Kaye, Jerry Lewis, Gary Grant and many others as we come to understand the undercurrents which express the unconscious sexuality of the culture at large.

Unlike films such as *The Celluloid Closet*, this offers a far more psychological form of film criticism accompanied with an excellent narration, witty insights and lots of superb clips and images. Many of these clips have not been seen before and offer a priceless history of homosexual themes in cinema.

As films are decoded, dissected and analysed you realize just how visible we really were in the history in cinema, it is just that most viewers did not know what to look for ! Extras include the never before seen short video "John Garfield", Don't Ask, Don't Tell T-Shirt Gallery and Trailers.

Web: <http://www.waterbearerfilms.com>



**The Most Dangerous Man In America
Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers
Antidote Films
R4 DVD**

This documentary tracks one of the most important cases in American legal history. The story spanned decades of the war in Vietnam and finished up in the U.S. courts to decide the matters of freedom of speech, even the publishing of top secret documents, and the right of the American public to be informed if their leaders were lying to them. The recent scandal of supposed weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is an accurate parallel of the Pentagon Papers scandal.

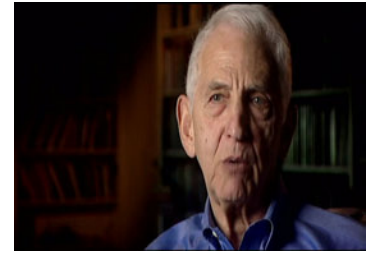
Young Daniel Ellsberg was an intelligence analyst at the Rand Corporation, an intelligence organization set up in California by the U.S. military. The documentary has it that Rand was set up in California to keep a low profile and to reduce interference in its work by government officials and agencies. One of its products was a massive analysis of the Vietnam war – its history under the U.S.- financed French, the U.S. military buildup under President Johnson, and its current conduct. Many of the report's findings were counter to what the President was saying publicly. Ellsberg visited Vietnam in person and was surprised at the discrepancy about what was being reported and what was actually happening.

Johnson was determined to pursue an aggressive anti-Communist policy and information that ran counter to this was quashed at a high level. The report was classified Top Secret as much to prevent it falling into the President's hands as for any other reason. The President's advisers wanted the President to hear only what he wanted to hear.

As successive Presidents lied to the Press (they didn't want to be seen as the president who lost a war) and the American people Ellsberg became convinced that the war was a fraud and should be stopped. He distributed copies of the Pentagon Papers to a number of politicians who all seemed to develop cold feet at the idea of appearing unpatriotic.

Finally Ellsberg supplied a copy to the Boston Globe, who began to publish the massive document. They were soon stopped by a court in-

junction brought by the government. Ellsberg then supplied copies to the Washington Post who continued publication. They too were stopped by injunction. Eventually seventeen papers had published parts of the papers. When the injunctions finally came to court for decision the courts ruled against "preemptive censorship" by use of the Top Secret classification. The First Amendment to the American Constitution, guaranteeing free speech, was upheld even in cases where the information would disadvantage the government.



President Nixon was incensed at the court decision and decided to go after Ellsberg and discredit him. The same team that burgled Watergate also broke into Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office (he was under tremendous stress). They tapped his phones for two years before charges were brought against him. Finally Ellsberg and a friend were charged with a list of crimes that could have got them 115 years in prison.

The judge dismissed the case saying the government's argument was so tainted by malpractice and illegal acts that a fair trial would not be possible. He also revealed that he had been offered a job as head of the FBI, presuming the "right" decision was passed down. Nixon was threatened with impeachment over Watergate and resigned. Congress finally cut off funds for the Vietnam war.

The case was important to the U.S. because it reined in the power of "imperial" presidents and guaranteed the right to free speech for newspapers. The government could no longer hide behind "national security" as an excuse for secrecy.

It was also important on a world scale because a later President learned nothing from it. Without newspaper exposure of the lies told about the reason for invading Iraq the world could still be looking for weapons of mass destruction.

The documentary is well laid out and clearly put. It is a lesson on the power of the people and the legal system if the people are properly informed.

Videocracy
Dogwoof
R2 DVD

How do you get to be the most powerful man in a country like Italy? This film traces the rise to power of Silvio Berlusconi from president of an obscure country TV channel to President of Italy. Along the way his effect on Italy's people has been to increasingly trivialise what they see on TV and reduce the factual information they receive.

He started by introducing game shows on his TV channel that involved lots of scantily clad women. It was cheap and trashy but worked. In staid, Catholic Italy his formula of trash, trivia and tits was so effective that he bought more channels and now controls 90% of Italy's private TV.

Many young Italian girls now have little more aspiration than to be a TV hostess and eventually marry a billionaire footballer. These girls are selected for the TV shows on the basis of their looks and figure. They are not allowed to speak on air. The Italians call them "Veline". They are expected to hang around the show's male presenter, look attractive, and perform short sexy dance routines in the breaks between shows to keep the viewers on the channel. It's no wonder that Italy is way down on the list of equality for women, but it's the young women themselves who have been conditioned to want this.

We also meet Ricardo, a young man who would like to make it in TV. His act is a combination of Ricky Martin-like songs and karate moves. He feels he is being blocked by not being a velina. There simply doesn't seem to be any room for young up-and-coming males regardless of their



talents. We also meet Lele Mora, and agent who is a friend of Berlusconi's. He compares Berlusconi with Mussolini in terms of personal power, and he obviously worships Mussolini. He also seems fond of having briefly clad young men decorating his pool. There is not a velina in sight.

With increasing income and power from his TV stations over three decades Berlusconi was able to make a successful run for President. Here he carried out one of his greatest successes. In spite of rumours of fraud and corruption he was able to have a law passed that made him immune from prosecution. He was also now in charge of Italy's publicly-owned TV stations so had some control over what the viewers saw. Effectively he was now completely protected from prosecution and able to control what news the Italian people were given.

It is easy to say that the Italian people got the politician they deserved but that simplifies the situation. How can you counter a man like Berlusconi when most Italians get their news from TV and he controls the stations? When this film was released in 2009 it was refused any coverage on Italian TV. Even a 30-second ad for the film was blocked.

Unfortunately Erik Gandini's film has a number of flaws to do with uncorroborated statements. Does every girl in Italy really want to be a velina? There are no interviews with veline or would-be veline. Are they really that shallow? Would Ricardo have had more success if he had more talent? Based on what we see in his audition, that could well be the case. There are just too many unsupported assertions for the film to be truly convincing. This is a shame, because if true it would be a lesson to us all that too much power should not be in the hands of one person.

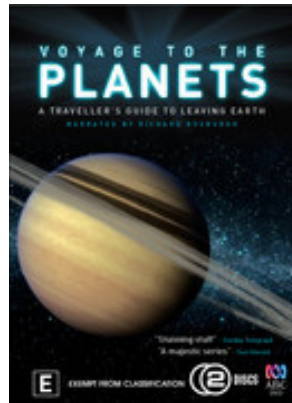


**Voyage to the Planets
A Traveller's Guide to Leaving Earth
ABC DVD
Roadshow**

Voyage to the Planets is narrated by Richard Roxburgh and while packed to the brim with technical information is presented in such a way that it is a joy to watch. Each episode is presented in the form of a travel guide and answers such questions as what would be the journey be like to each planet? What are the dangers? What are the great sights that cannot be missed and, most significantly, what do you need to know about each planet before embarking on your quest.

The series is beautifully presented with stunning animations, interesting interviews and include quirky and unusual side discussions to keep up your interest. The soundtrack is energetic but not overpowering. The balance between content which is highly technical and reaching a wide audience is sometimes hard to achieve but Voyage to the Planet's does well. Occasionally there were some moments when the need for a broad appeal annoyed me, such as the "surfs up" music at the beginning and the rather ocker debate about how to pronounce Uranus with all the related toilet humour. But these are very minor criticisms.

Each episode offers the very best of contemporary astronomy with interviews with scientists, discussions of past and future space journeys by NASA and the European space agency and lots of interesting fact and figures. The compre-



hensive summary of ongoing and upcoming space missions which will offer new data over the next decades actually fills the viewer with excitement about the future of astronomy.

The nexus of the series is a room filled with images projected on large screeners where people of different ages (teens, adults and child) co-ordinate the various segments of each show. It is also very sci fi and very impressive.

Episode 1 – We begin our journey with a journey to the red planet of Mars and then in Episode 2 come face to face with the largest planet in our Solar System, Jupiter.

Episode 3 – We take a trip to planetary pin-up boy, Saturn, and not only do you get a ringside seat to the greatest spectacle in the Solar System and find out the secret of those amazing rings but experience its two moons.

Episode 4 – Looks at the cold ice giants of Uranus and Neptune, while in Episode 5 we turn the other direction and explore the Hot planets of Venus and Mercury.

In Episode 6 we come to experience the once-was-planet of Pluto and are introduced to the outer reaches of the Kuiper Belt and beyond.



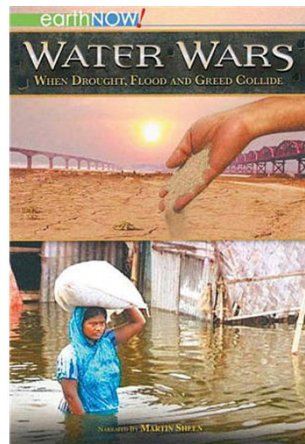
Water Wars
Cinema Libre Studio
R1 DVD

Water is essential to mankind and civilisations have risen and fallen around its availability. Political problems arise when a country cuts off rivers flowing through it rather than allow a flow to its neighbours downstream. Even here in Australia, all one country, there is conflict between neighbouring States over how much water each should be allowed for its farmers and how much should continue downstream for other States. There is an attitude among some farmers that every drop of water that flows past their property is wasted.

This documentary centres on Bangladesh where the problem is twofold. Neighbouring (and upstream) India is actively damming the rivers that flow into Bangladesh, causing drought at times, and releasing water downstream without notice when the dams are full, causing fatal flooding. The problems of too little then too much water are highlighted in this impoverished country. The early scenes of the documentary are taken during the monsoon season when 70% of the country is flooded, but this year the monsoons have failed. The flooding is caused by India releasing water from its brimming dams

India is itself water-starved in some areas and needs additional agriculture to support its growing population, but that isn't the whole story.

The reason for many of the new dams accord-



ing to environmentalists is simply for power generation. Power is a commodity that India can sell to neighbouring countries. The dams scheme envisages blocking flows down the Brahmaputra river to Bangladesh and diverting the water westwards along the Indian side of the border. Power generation dams are spotted throughout the scheme, up to forty of them. Too bad about Bangladesh's needs. It seems India's irresponsible actions are purely profit-based and their neighbours' needs are irrelevant. Because of such actions in India, China and other countries dams now threaten to displace up to 400 million people.

It is not all good news for the Indians either. The two main companies have such political influence that they can let the dam waters back up and flood villages and agricultural land, forcing relocation of part of the local population. There is little or no compensation offered for this.

As one person points out, the only thing that can stop India is the Chinese, if they dam the rivers on their side of the border and cut the flows to India.

In Bangladesh much of the water is now drawn from underground and is contaminated with arsenic. Although clean drinking water has been declared a basic human right it will only become reality if a cheap technology can be found to filter out the pollutants. A Bangladeshi scientist working in the United States feels he may have the solution, but will there be enough profit in this to attract a firm to make the units?

The documentary paints a grim picture. Without some responsibility on the part of countries like India it seems doomed to erupt into a shooting war sometime soon. This can only make the situation worse for Bangladesh.



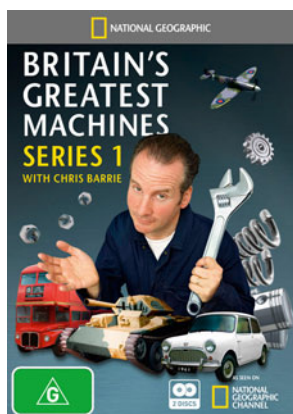


National Geographic is now distributed in Australia by Madman Entertainment. A whole new and exciting range of educational, informative and provocative titles is now available in region 4.

National Geographic is a major producer of documentaries in the United States and it is fantastic development to finally have such a wide range of thought provoking documentaries available in the Australian Market.

**Britain's Greatest
Machines Series 1
National
Geographic
Channel
Madman
R4 DVD**

"Take a look at the engineering feats that shaped the 20th century".



That may be putting it a little strongly, but the influence of British engineers on the technology of the 20th century cannot be denied. This wonderful 4-part 2-DVD set highlights many of those developments from the 1930s, 1950s, 1960s and 1980s.

Presenter Chris Barrie shows us, with a touch of humour, why many of the feats came about. In the 1930s, for instance, steam was drawing its last gasp but petrol engines did not yet have the sheer power of steam. By introducing streamlining into areas like railway locomotives the technology lasted long enough for the newer diesel and electric engines to catch up. Streamlining also made its way into aircraft where it helped to increase the carrying capacity and speed of the early aircraft.

There is some great film of the De Havilland



Dragon Rapide, an early streamlined airliner. It contrasts with the unstreamlined German Junkers 52 which can be compared unfavourably with a corrugated iron shed.

The 1950s was a boom time for Britain. Almost bankrupt after the war, its engineers were urgently looking for products to earn export dollars. They were up to the task and some of the innovations were startling. Few people remember that one of the first production jet engines was British, but even fewer remember the De Havilland Comet, the first jet airliner. It was a commercial failure due to its habit of exploding under the stresses of metal fatigue but for a time Britain led the U.S. in commercial jet-engined aircraft. In a later decade their Vulcan was the world's first nuclear-capable bomber. A beautiful if deadly aircraft, it survived until replaced by nuclear submarines.

Aircraft were always a strong point of British engineers, but their expertise spread into more mundane areas. Clive Sinclair's early computer, the ZX80, could have been a world leader until it was nudged out by the sheer numbers of computers being produced in the U.S. Perhaps one of the most famous but least appreciated British products was the LandRover. Designed as a sort of upgraded Willys Jeep it became the firm friend of farmers worldwide and worked its



way into many other fields.

It saved Rover from bankruptcy and gave Britain many needed export dollars. Another unsung hero of the British motor industry was the humble Ford Transit van. It was designed to make driving a small truck as easy as driving a car and it succeeded beyond Ford's wildest imagination. Barrie points out that it was faster than most police cars of the time and so became the getaway vehicle of choice in 60% of the bank robberies of the 1960s. It's the little bits like this that make the documentary so much fun.

Cars have always been another British strong point. Produced as a cheap solution to the world oil crises, the Mini became an icon of the times. First it became cheap transport for the masses, then it became trendy, then under Colin Cooper's influence it became a sports icon as well. But who knows that the De Lorean (as in *Back To The Future*) was actually built in Britain? Beset by corruption charges against its maker, crippled by the U.S. laws demanding a catalytic converter that robbed 25% of the engine's power, it was nevertheless a well-designed car built with a long lifetime in mind.

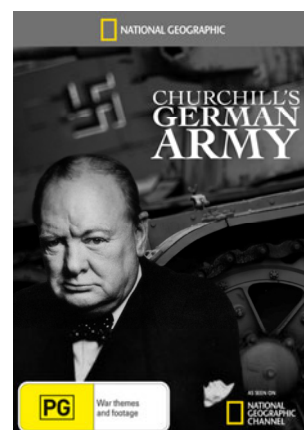
Barrie ranges far and wide to show us the advances of which he is so justifiably proud. The radio telescope at Jodrell Bank is still in operation today, half a century after it was built. Its construction was dogged by cost overruns due to the Government's top secret requirement that it should be capable of acting as a long distance radar to detect Russian missile launches. This, of course, could not be revealed to the oversight committees and its designer ran the risk of be-

ing jailed on fraud charges.

Even in the 1980s when Britain was slipping back from being a world power the innovations kept on. Christopher Cockerell's Hovercraft was put into production by Saunders Roe and culminated in the huge cross-Channel car ferries. Although they have now been retired from service his legacy lives on in the military hovercraft used by a number of assault forces like the U.S. Marines. The hovercraft can reach 95% of the world's coastlines, conventional shipping can only reach 5%.

The series is a huge project but it is well produced and well filmed. Barrie's presentation style shows his passion for the inventions and he is lucky enough to take us inside many of them. The series is a tribute to British engineers.

**Churchill's German
Army
National
Geographic
Channel
Madman
R4 DVD**



This documentary chronicles the lives of six German Jews who escaped to Britain and became part of the British war effort. Most never saw their families again. Although their stories are sad each one handled the crisis in his own way and they came out of the war with surprising records of valour and





stories of survival.

Initially they were regarded with distrust by the British, including Churchill (the DVD title is misleading – Churchill appeared to have no idea of the value of German speakers in invading Germany). Some tried to make a living in Britain, but were eventually rounded up and interned as enemy aliens when war was declared. Some joined the Pioneer Corps, a semi-military construction organization. These fared somewhat better and were usually regarded as having proved their loyalty.

In the military they soon proved their value. Some were decorated for their work, one left the Army with the honorary rank of Major. Unlike Churchill, the military soon came to recognise their value. In later life success followed some of them as well.

When sent back into Germany on combat duty their names were anglicised in case of repercussions if they were captured. Willy Herschfeld became Willy Field and served in a tank crew in the attacks towards Nijmegen in Holland. His tank was blown up and he was the only survivor. It affected him greatly, as he had become firm friends with the others of the tank troop who knew his background and accepted him as he was. When he returned to active service he was stationed in Denmark and had the incredible fortune to arrest the notorious Lord HawHaw, a Briton who broadcast propaganda for the Germans.

Claus Hugo Adam became Ken Adam and flew Typhoon ground attack fighters, a highly dangerous job. After the war he became a production designer for the film industry and was re-



sponsible for the look of many of the James Bond films.

Claus Ascher joined the Royal Marines and became Colin Anson. He was severely injured in the landings on Sicily with what should have been a fatal head wound.

The saddest part is the mens' reaction to re-entering Germany. The cities where they had grown up were razed, most of the people they knew were gone. It now seemed like a foreign country to them, even after only a few years absence, and they all felt they were British rather than German. It became even sadder when they entered the death camps and realised what had happened to their families.

Over ten thousand Germans volunteered to fight for Britain. Their history has been almost completely ignored until now. This documentary will help to set the record straight.

Egyptian Secrets of the Afterlife National Geographic Channel Madman R4 DVD

This beautifully filmed and highly detailed documentary discusses the ancient Egyptian preoccupation with death and the afterlife. They were one of the first civilisations to include resurrection after death as a religious motif and we see how the preoccupation grew in the decorations and fittings of the earliest Egyptian rulers' simple





tombs and human sacrifice to the elaborate constructions of the Ptolemaic Pharaohs.

The later beliefs centred on the need of the Pharaoh to find his way to the heavens where he would ensure that the sun would continue to rise each morning. The belief was that each night when the sun set it was destroyed and would need the hand of a divinity to ensure that it was reborn the next morning. Along the journey through the afterlife the Pharaoh would face a number of trials set to weed out the unworthy.

At the end of the journey he would be reunited with his preserved body and triumphantly take his place among the gods. If he failed to complete the trials he would be destroyed by Apophis, an underworld demon whose form was that of a huge snake. This would literally prevent the sun from being reborn and mean the end of the cosmos.

It is easy to dismiss these rituals and beliefs as the usual rantings of a priestly class trying to preserve their place in the power structure, but many of the beliefs found their way into other later religions. Their influence was such that they must have been believed by the common people, not just the hierarchy.

Dr Zahi Hawass, head of the Egyptian Antiquities Board and the Cairo Museum, takes us through the death and resurrection ritual step by step, illustrating the story with paintings from tombs. Through his position he has access to many areas not open to the public. The tomb paintings are not just decorative but a set of instructions for the dead Pharaoh to follow to reach the eternal afterlife.

The priests cheated here, though. They believed that just writing down the steps would au-



tomatically ensure that the Pharaoh would follow them and succeed. Continuing archaeological discoveries by Dr Hawass and others keep adding to our knowledge of the intricate set of beliefs of this powerful civilisation.

In a major extra included on the DVD we see the development of a new exhibition at the Cairo Museum. Like so many museums what is on show to the public is only a fraction of the artefacts held in basements and storage buildings around the country.

Dr Hawass has called all these artefacts in for cataloguing and restoration and we are privileged to see a number of items that have never been on public display before. Many are simply beautiful works of art or jewellery, but many have great historical significance as well. Once again the documentary takes us into areas not open to the public.

Dr Hawass has a reputation for trying to recover and return to Egypt many of the artefacts looted from his country in the earlier days. Such exhibitions as the one being planned are a way to show the world the rich culture of his country.

Includes bonus feature:
Egypt's Hidden Treasures.



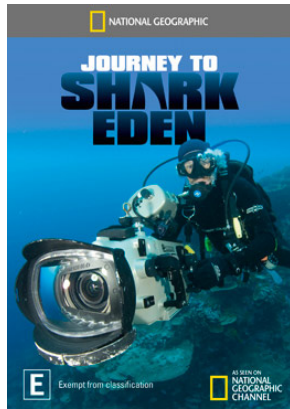
**Journey to Shark
Eden
National Geographic
Madman
R4 DVD**

The major documentary is Journey to Shark Eden which documents a unique journey covering some 3,300 kilometres in 30-days visiting truly remote islands in the South Pacific.

Far from civilisation, a team of scientists, led by Dr. Enric Sala and joined by National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Mike Fay search for undisturbed islands which have an abundance of coral, fish and, of course, Sharks.

This is a strange world which seems to contradict current scientific evidence; it is a world where predators outnumber prey. This is an amazing world so abundant with life that it gives us a hint of what island life may have been like before man's intervention. Sadly many of the islands have been effected by the harvesting of guano. This product, which was the excrement of birds, was extensively used as a fertilizer and whole island ecosystems were decimated in the search for and collection of this expensive substance. By the end of the 19th century the guano industry was eclipsed by the introduction of artificial fertilizers but by then untold damage had be done to rare island ecosystems.

As they visit these rare island, they find over three times as much coral as any other reef in the Indo-Pacific on Flint Island. While on Malden Island – the test site of three nuclear bombs in 1958 – the team finds a reef exploding with life and ten times more sharks than any other studied reef on the planet. Millennium Atoll offers a surprising refuge for blacktip reef



sharks while Starbuck Island has the second largest biomass of any reef ever studied.

This is an amazing journey to what could be best defined as Shark Eden.

The bonus feature on this DVD is called *Ultimate Shark* and is certainly as interesting as Journey to Shark Eden if not a little more so. While so many people fear the great white shark this is a documentary objectively examining its biology and history.

The great white has bloodlines which go back some 400 million years and indeed are older than dinosaurs. The sad fact is that due to their demonization as "cold blooded" killers the major danger to their survival is man. This superb documentary examines their unique biology including a rare direction which includes examination of the great white's electrical sense. Computer graphics are used to help us understand the unique anatomy of the great white and the unusual structure of its brain.

There is also a stunning tagging operation where a truly gigantic great white is hauled on board and tagged with a satellite training system so its movements can be tracked.



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Razer Emperor

The Razer Emperor is a superior quality ergonomic gaming mouse. It is approx. 123(L) x 71 (W) x 42(H) mm. It has seven independently programmable Hyperresponse buttons. The emperor uses Razer's unique tracking engine that has a 5600dpi laser sensor with a 1000Hz polling rate for 1ms response time. The mouse also has on-board memory so you can store DPI settings and macros.

It is nicely packed with a product manual, installation guide, product setup leaflet, some stickers, a certificate of authenticity. The mouse itself is a black semi-gloss colour with the razer logo which lights up when it is active. When the scroll wheel is turned on it is a backlit blue, and the rear logo also pulses with the same hue.

It has a very comfortable feel and fits in your



hand perfectly, it is the sort of mouse you could use for hours and hours on end and now feel sore. It has a seven foot lightweight braided fibre cable and hence will reach wherever you need it to go and has a gold plated USB connector. The Emperor also has Zero-acoustic Ultraslick Teflon feet.

The software is quick to install, simple to understand and easy to use. It has a clean interface and makes customising a breeze.

I especially like the ultra large non slip buttons and the adjustable side buttons. It is a mouse that is easy to like, it is very customizable, simple to use and super responsive.

For gameplay it is comfortable and reliable and is certainly one of the better gaming mice on the market.



TOYS ARE US

a revolution in plastic

**Toys are Us:
A Revolution in
Plastic
X Ray Films
All Region DVD**

Made by X-Ray Films and first time director Brian Stillman *Toys Are Us: A Revolution in Plastic* is, at around half an hour, a modest but immensely enjoyable foray into the weird and wonderful world of designer toys. For those who know little about designer toys and vinyl figures *Toys Are Us* will be a fascinating introduction to what at first may seem an obscure underground arts movement, and for those in the know it will be a welcome validation of their passion for this truly exciting art form!

For some time now I'd been eagerly waiting for this cool indie-documentary to finally be released, as it's one of the first tentative explorations in film of the art toy and urban vinyl phenomenon. The documentary focuses on the vinyl figure/urban vinyl element of the designer toy phenomenon as there's no doubt that it is, by and large, the most popular means of expression in the wider subculture... the superstar if you will.

The modern designer toy movement began in Hong Kong and Japan in the late 1990s, but as



Frank Kozic

is discussed in this film its creative roots go back as far as the early 1980s to a time when Japanese artists were trying to recreate the beloved toys of their childhood. It is also discussed how many fans and toy creators in the US often misperceive designer toys as a relatively new phenomenon, and how there seems to be a general unawareness of the true history of this art form. To me it comes as no surprise at all that designer toys had their aesthetic germination that early on considering that the Japanese have a prized history of making diecast tin and plastic toys, and also that they have a track record of taking seriously forms of expression that in the West are considered to be crude long before we have usually caught on. This gem of a film includes candid interviews with the likes of such creative luminaries as Tara McPherson, Frank Kozik, Patrick Ma, Erick Scarecrow, Mark Nagata, Mars-1, Voltaire, Nathan Jurevicius and many more as well as a few amusingly brief discussions with hyped up fans at trendy inner city gallery functions and the world famous San Diego Comic-Con.

There aren't many special features but I'm sure the few there are will keep you glued to the screen for a good hour or so. There are four extended interviews with Mario Martinez (aka Mars-1) Frank Kozik, Brian Flynn and Patrick Ma that are a revealing glimpse into the uniquely creative minds of these talented artists. The extended interview with Frank Kozik was especially fascinating for me as he comes across as the most articulate, insightful and surprisingly blunt of all four interviewees... although Patrick Ma certainly deserves special mention as well. A cool extra feature is the multimedia presentation of five bands whose music is featured in the documentary including songs, examples of album and poster art and some background info. This short yet funky documentary is one of the first to explore the intriguing world of this creative arts subculture and there are also at least another two in postproduction, and I'm sure that there will be many more to come. If like me you're obsessed with these adult playthings *Toys Are Us: A Revolution in Plastic* will be a must see; and for those who are new to its bizarre and often challenging but always stimulating world where art and commerce merge, it should be more than enough to make you want to find out more.

Distributed by Wizard Sleeve Toys
Web: <http://www.wizardsleevetoy.com>

Gary Basemen

Gary Baseman (b. 1960) is an artist who works in diverse media including drawing, painting, illustration, toy design, animation, television and live performance. He coined the term, “pervasive art” to describe his approach to art since he has found that his work has moved beyond the traditional delineations of the old world artist.

Basemen did not attend art school and was self-taught, being inspired by MAD magazine, Disney and Warner Bros characters. During the eighties he established himself as an illustrator and since then has gone from strength to strength publishing his work in such prestige publications as the New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, Time, Rolling Stone and The New York Times. One of Baseman's most celebrated achievements was the development of his best-selling board game Cranium. After spending ten years in New York (1986–1996) working in illustration, he returned to Los Angeles and began to hold exhibitions which many saw as marking his transition from illustration to fine art. His style is curious mixing cuddly and cute creatures into dark, confronting and sometimes confronting subject matter. It is usually defined as Low Brow or Pop Surrealism.

As a matter of course many of his cuddly creatures made the crossover into the vinyl toy market. Prominent characters include *Toby*, the “best friend who loves you unconditionally, and is the keeper of your dirty lil secrets”;



Gary Basemen



HotChaChaCha, “the little devil who deflowers angels by stealing their haloes”; and *ChouChou*, who “takes away negative energy and hate and oozes Creamy Gooley Love”.

HotChaChaCha is a stunning example of Baseman's style. It is six and a half inches tall and has a mood of a fifties tiki with related bright colours. It is a fun figure yet with a dark and naughty edge - “the little devil who deflowers angels by stealing their haloes”. His is bright pink in colour with stylized characteristics. He has a one piece black eyebrow, wide eyes and a devilish tail. The amount of detail on the figure is impressive, marks such as those on the ears and cheeks are not simply presented on the surface but cut into the vinyl to give it a truly three dimensional presentation.

HotChaChaCha comes in packaged inside of a tall haute couture coffin box. He is limited to a 500 piece run. Other editions in various colours are also available.

He has also been involved into television work, creating Disney's animated series *Teacher's Pet* about a dog who dresses up as a boy because he wants to go to school, and disguises himself by wearing a beanie cap and glasses. He continues to surprise adding performance art to his artistic canon, combining live performances with limited edition vinyl toys.

The event included costumed live models of Baseman's female characters, including *Skeleton Girl*, *Hickey Bat Girl*, *Bubble Girl*, and *Co-coon/Butterfly Girl*.

We recommend Wizard Sleeve Toys to purchase *HotChaChaCha* and other Gary Basemen art toys.

Web: <http://www.wizardsleevetoy.com>

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Influenced by classic animation, graphic design, and daily life, Joe Ledbetter's art is... well... a lot of things. Light-hearted in its approach, he often

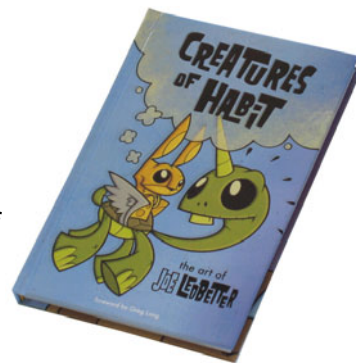
combines cute and cuddly creatures with unfortunate — albeit humorous — situations. With a lean on the subversive and absurd, these scenarios are all too familiar, questioning our tendency of taking life (and ourselves) too seriously.

While working as a graphic apparel artist for three years, Ledbetter got involved in the Los Angeles underground art scene, beginning with group shows like Cannibal Flower. By the summer of 2004, he had honed his trademark visual style of emblematic line-work, vibrant colors, and endearing characters to the point of quitting his day job. With international appeal, he has had numerous solo exhibitions in Los Angeles, Tokyo, London, Paris, Rome, Toronto, Taipei, Istanbul, and Amsterdam. His incredible cast of creatures have since been emblazoned on over a hundred designer vinyl toys, as well as apparel and lifestyle brands, the world over. This vinyl creations range from Unicornasaurus to Terror and Magnus, Magnus & Friday and the upcoming release of the truly huge figure combination, Pico and Wilshire.



Unicornasaurus

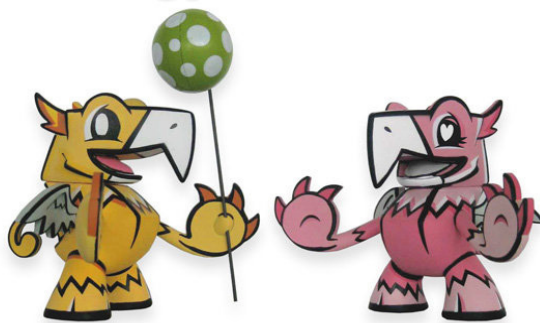
Ledbetter is also a consummate artists and anyone wishing to explore his strange and wonderful art will adore *Creatures of Habit* (Last Gasp Books).



The hardcover bound volume chronicles the progression of five years of Ledbetter's craft, from 2003 to 2008, and presents 186 pages of Ledbetter's most exemplary work in full colour for fans to explore and enjoy.

This is really an eccentric volume filled to the brim with insane characters which combine the lovable and cute with the violent and deranged. An bizarre purple ape sports pointed fangs and throws the sign of the horns while riding on the back of a demon-red goat, while a unicorn-horned turtle belies its unassuming lavender-colored sweetness and boldly gouges at the guts of its opponent.

MAGNUS MAXIMUS & FRIDAY



One of the more recent sets released by Ledbetter is Magnus & Friday. These marvelous little creatures come in a standard release and in the Metamorphosis Edition. They are presented suspended in flight in a window box and seduce you even before you open the package.

Each figure is striking with stylized presentation and three points of ratification. Magnus even comes with his own traveling knapsack. They have been released in an edition of 399 so will sell out quickly.

Web: <http://www.wizardsleeve toys.com>



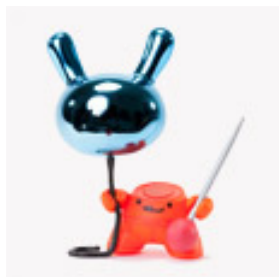
Dunny Series 2010

Blind Assortment, buy them and get a surprise inside the box ! Each blind-boxed 3-inch Dunny figure comes with a trading card and a chance to win a super-rare Golden Ticket Dunny – some even include accessories.



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To describe the Dunnys is difficult, you really need to experience the sheer creative madness of each one for yourself. However, let me describe three of them.



There is an orange Dunny, holding his head as a balloon with what looks like a large toothpick in his other hand.

There is a truly delicious Dunny, transparent and covered in skeletal tattoo designs and the third has two sets of eyes and a Hello T-Shirt. (pictured above with a couple of other 2010 Dunny releases)

The 2010 Dunnys are marked by even more detail than those of earlier years and are true collectibles. We recommend Tenacious Toys who have them in stock.

Web: <http://www.tenacioustoys.com>

Dr.Brain

Another amazing art toy from Tenacious is Dr.Brain. He is sci fi wonder, presented in bright yellow with his brain floating in green fluid. He wears a gas like mask, has a green button on his chest and has tanks of air or fluid on his back. He holds out his hands as though to say "today the world, tomorrow the universe". He is a very high quality vinyl creation, some seven inches tall and is in a 500 run only. He has been produced by Raje Toys.





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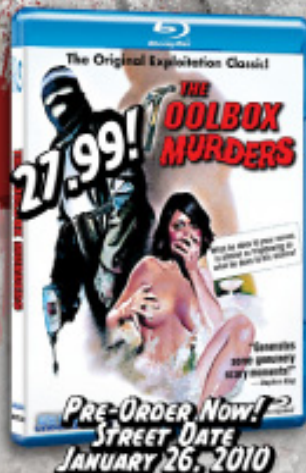
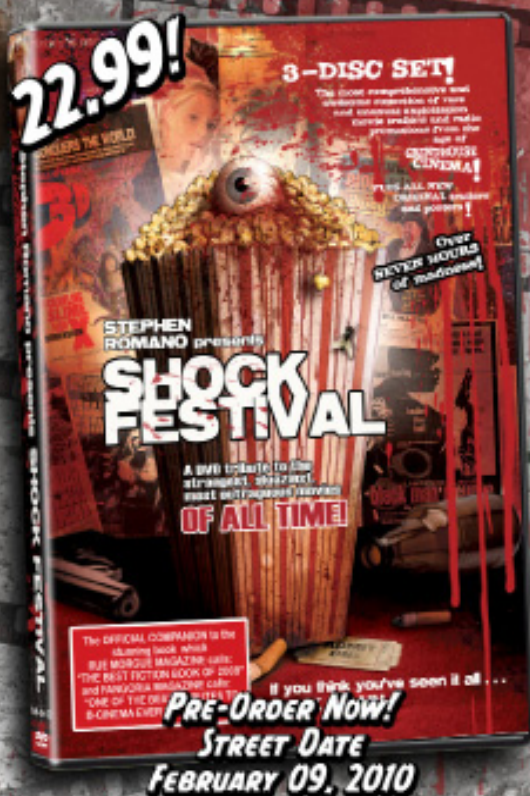
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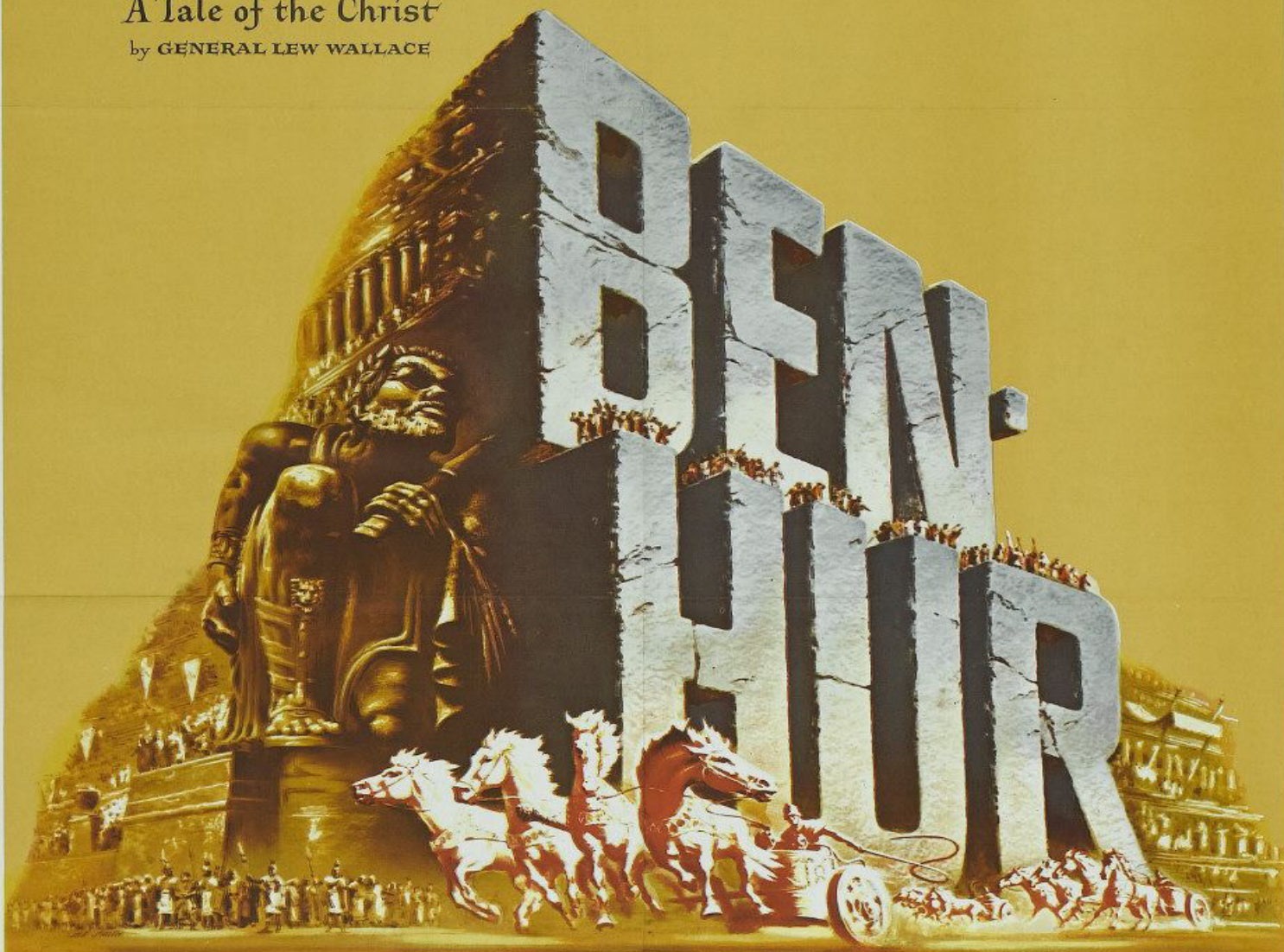
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